

MISSOURI, IOWA, AND OHIO

The Old and the New Differences



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INTRODUCTION

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The first twenty years of this century were marked by a decided tendency toward unification in the American Lutheran Church. Many private and official conferences were held in various quarters to discuss and, if possible, to overcome doctrinal differences.

Among the Norwegians a way was found in 1917 to compromise their differences and to form one church body, "The Norwegian Lutheran Church of America," while only a small minority "refused for conscience sake to enter the merger and were bound to continue in the old paths." (Conc. Cycl. pg. 546.)

Likewise the General Synod, the General Council, and the United Synod in the South merged into one body in 1920.

But, in spite of all the efforts to bring about a better understanding between the synods of Missouri and Wisconsin on one side and those of Iowa, Ohio, and Buffalo on the other side, up to the present day the desired unity has not yet been accomplished.

What seems to be the difficulty? To the outsider or to any one who is not acquainted with the situation it might appear as though the differences which keep these synods apart were nothing but a quarrel about triflings, hairsplitting arguments of theologians with little or no practical interest for the Christian lay members.

But let us go to the bottom of the matter, and we shall see that such an attitude can not be upheld. It is a fact that the starting-point of most separations in the Christian Church was made with a departure from the pure and plain teaching of Scripture, an error, or errors, which, as a rule, can easily be detected and recognized as false doctrine. But after the error had been exposed and rejected the matter was never ended. An error once refuted is by no means silenced, it will return again and again; yet not in its old form in which it was rejected, but in a

new garb in which it seems to be harmless and innocent. In this seemingly harmless form it seeks first toleration, then recognition, finally absolute dominion in the Church.

This is the way in which false doctrines usually creep into a church, and after having gained admission will work there as a destructive leaven.

It is the purpose of the following articles to offer all that are interested, ministers as well as teachers and lay members, information about the doctrinal differences between the afore-mentioned groups of synods so as to enable the reader to form his own judgment. To this end each chapter first presents the crude form of the error in which a false doctrine is easily recognized by any Christian, then, step by step, the more refined and seemingly harmless forms are shown in which the same error tries to hide itself. In this way, by never losing the thread of thought, Christians will be able to perceive even the most subtle and skillful disguise of false doctrine.

The differences which will occupy our attention in the following chapters are those concerning the Church and the Ministry, Open Questions, Millennium and Antichrist, Sunday, Conversion and Predestination. The question of the Inerrancy of Holy Scripture, the most recent developement in doctrinal differences, will be referred to.

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THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH  
AND THE MINISTRY

## Roman and Lutheran Doctrine

The point of controversy as to the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry is best brought out by going back to the first beginnings of the synod of Missouri as well as that of Iowa and comparing their principles with those that were at stake in that great conflict between Luther and the Romanists at the time of the Reformation. With this difference before us we shall clearly see our way in this present controversy.

What, then, is the Church? According to the Roman Catholic conception the Church is an external, visible kingdom, with a visible head, the Pope, and the whole train of cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests, who under the supremacy of the Pope are to rule the Christians. Members of the Church, they say, are all those who are found under this church government, even hypocrites and wicked people, if they are only associated with the Roman hierarchy. So, then, the Roman idea of the Church evidently is that of an external, visible kingdom, just as the kingdoms of this world.

Luther, on the other hand, showed that according to Scripture the Church is nothing but all Christendom, as we also confess in the Third Article of our Christian Creed: "I believe in the holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints." All true Christians who are sanctified through faith in Christ are the building stones of this spiritual temple of the Lord (Eph. 2, 19-22). Whoever is not converted through faith in Christ does not belong to this spiritual temple even though he be a member of some congregation.

Hence the Christian Church is an entirely spiritual realm, an invisible kingdom (Luke 17, 20. 21) since no one can judge the heart and see the faith but God alone (2 Tim. 2, 19). Nevertheless though we cannot see this Communion of Saints, we **believe** that there is and always will be a Holy Christian Church on earth, **because the Word of God tells us** (Matt. 16, 18) that the gates of hell will never prevail against the Church.

This point is of vital importance and cannot be stressed too strongly that here we are dealing with a **Doctrine of Scripture**, with **an article of faith**, in other words, the Church is not something we can **see** or otherwise perceive with our senses, but something **we believe on the authority of Scripture**.

Luther stressed this point again and again over against the Romanists: we do not say in the Third Article, **I see** a Christian Church, but: **I believe** a Christian Church; for, what we believe we do not see nor feel. Hebr. 11, 1. (Erl. 27, 303.)

This is also the plain teaching of the Lutheran Confessions. We read in the Smalc. Art., "For, thank God, today a



child seven years old knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd. For the children pray thus: I believe in one holy Christian Church. This holiness does not consist in albs, tonsures, long gowns, and other of their ceremonies devised by them beyond Holy Scripture, but in the Word of God and true faith." (Smalc. Art. Part III, Art. XII) St. L. Ed. pg. 148.

The same vast contrast existing between the Roman and the Lutheran teaching is also evident in the doctrine of the Ministry. In the Church of Rome the Pope as the pretended representative of Christ ruled over the whole Church. The cardinals, archbishops, bishops and priests with the Pope as their head were considered the true kings and priests in the Church; for them it was to fix doctrine and to control the life of the Christians, while laymen, as subjects, were only to obey and to accept the doctrine preached to them. The right to judge doctrine, to call ministers, etc., was withheld from them and is denied to them in the Church of Rome to this day. This part of the church-life was, and is to this day, being controlled entirely by the hierarchy.

Luther, on the other hand, showed from Scripture that this assumption of the clergy was a scandalous violation of the word of our Savior: "One is your master, even Christ, and ye are all brethren" (Matt. 23, 8). Before God **all Christians** are kings and priests. 1 Pet. 2, 9: "Ye are the chosen generation, a **royal priesthood**, an holy nation," etc.

In the well-known passage, John 20, 22, 23 ("When He had said this, He breathed on them, and said unto them," etc.) the power of the keys is given to **all disciples**. Each Christian congregation, be it ever so small, has this power as is seen from Matt. 18, 17-20, where the words are added: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

The Apostles, therefore, never considered themselves lords and masters over the Church, but servants of the congregations. 2 Cor. 1, 24: "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but we are helpers of your joy." Ch. 4, 5: "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus, the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." 1 Cor. 3, 5: "Who then is Paul, and who is Appollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?"

That the power of the keys, hence, also the right and the duty of calling and ordaining ministers is given to the Church, that is to the Christians, is stated in the Smalcald Articles with the following words: "In addition to this, it is

necessary to acknowledge that the keys belong not to the person of one particular man, but to the Church, as many most clear and firm arguments testify. For Christ speaking concerning the keys Matt. 18, 19, adds: If two or three of you shall agree on earth, etc. Therefore He grants the keys principally and immediately to the Church, just as also for this reason the Church has principally the right of calling" (St. L. pg. 151).

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### **"By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them"**

Unfortunately, the principles laid down by Luther could not be carried out to their full extent in the land of the Reformation. Instead of keeping Church and State apart—as is the case in our country,—the churches in all Lutheran and Reformed countries were in the course of time again governed by the state, the king or reigning prince of the country in most cases being the head of the church.

Though, at first, this state of affairs was felt as improper by the truly Lutheran theologians, yet, by and by, it was taken as a matter of course. And the days came when even the theologians, instead of pointing out the shortcomings of this "state-churchism," began to accommodate the doctrine of the Church to prevailing circumstances. Losing sight of the fact that according to Scripture the Church is nothing but a gathering of Christians, the idea gained ground as though the Church were essentially an institution of salvation (Heilsanstalt), a visible organization properly arranged and ruled by a visible church-government. That this new conception of the Church was not a progress in the right direction—as those modern theologians flattered themselves—but a step backward toward Romanism, they did not see, or did not care to see.

The evil fruits of the false doctrine and the good fruits of the pure doctrine of the church became strikingly apparent in the course of the following event. It was in the year 1838 when a number of faithful Lutherans, under the leadership of the Pastor, M. Stephan, left their home in Saxony and settled in Perry Co. and St. Louis, Mo. On account of the Romanizing tendencies of their leader, however, this whole enterprise would have ended in miserable failure had not God graciously taken care of the little flock and purged them from unsound ideas with which they were afflicted.

Many of these Saxon pilgrims, having left their home country for the sake of their faith, were inclined to consider their own organization as the Christian Church on earth with

the exclusion of all others that laid claim to the Christian name. But Pastor Stephan who had been made their bishop and ruled over the settlement with arbitrary despotism was soon unmasked as a slave to vice and unchastity. This was a heavy blow for the young settlement and threatened to bring about the ruin of the congregation. The thought now gained ground that they had become victims of a great delusion, that they were no church at all, but a rabble, that the ministers in their midst had no legitimate call, their dispensing of the sacraments no validity. (Cf. Theo. Graebner Lutheran Pioneers pg. 20 f.) These were the fruits of the false doctrine of Church and Ministry.

In this great calamity God sent relief through the young pastor, C. F. W. Walther. A zealous student of the writings of Luther and the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church, Walther had gained a thorough understanding of the doctrine of the Church. He clearly saw that according to Scripture the Church is nothing but the Communion of Saints, all true Christians; that, therefore, a number of Christians, in spite of errors and scandals that may occur, is nevertheless a church if the essentials, Word and Sacraments, are there; and that to such a Church, that is to such a gathering of Christians, God has given the power of the keys, the right and the duty to establish the office of the ministry in their midst.

If this was correct, there was hope. Then those Christians were still a real congregation, a part of the Christian Church, then their ministers had a legitimate call, Word and Sacrament had still their power and validity, and all might be well after all.

Thus the preaching of the pure Scriptural doctrine by and by cleared the situation, peace and order were restored, and the congregations in St. Louis and Perry Co., Mo., began to prosper. The first seminary was built at Altenburg, the "Lutheraer" was published, and a time of peaceful development and growth in Christian knowledge followed. (For particulars concerning this period cf. Hochstetter, Geschichte der Missouri Synode and Concordia Cyclopedia, "Missouri Synod.")

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### The Organization of the Missouri Synod

Besides the Saxon pilgrims a great number of German emigrants had come into this country and in Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, etc., hundreds and hundreds of families lived without the Bread of Life. When the young candidate, Fr.

Wynecken, learned of the spiritual need of many of his countrymen in America he decided to leave his home country and to dedicate his life to the service of these scattered sheep having no shepherd.

It was through Wynecken's endeavors that the interest of the widely known pastor, W. Loehe, in Neuendettelsau, Bavaria, was won for the mission work in North America, and the congregations served by Wynecken and Loehe's missionaries in Ohio and Michigan together with the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri in 1847 organized the Synod of Missouri, Ohio and other states.

The most outstanding feature at the founding of this new synod was that from the very outset it was built on strictly Scriptural and Lutheran principles. Discarding all human authority of any kind the synod was to be an advisory body only, scrupulously guarding the rights of the congregation.

From all sides the young synod was warned that such a church-polity would be simply impossible, that especially in this country where Church and State are separated a strong church government would be indispensable. A very short life was prophesied to the new organization unless it would change its principles. But the founders of our synod had more confidence in the Word of God, as brought to light again by Luther, than in all the wise thoughts and suggestions of men. Unswervingly they went their way, and, behold, the plan worked excellently. The mustard seed did not only come up, but the plant continued to thrive and grew beyond all expectation and, under God's blessing, developed into a powerful tree that soon spread its branches over the whole continent.

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### Loehe's Plans

One of those who watched the development of the young synod with growing discontent was Pastor Loehe who with his work for North America had great and far reaching plans. What he was striving after was nothing less than a gathering of all faithful Lutherans of the German tongue in America under one common church government. While fearlessly bearing testimony against rationalism and preaching the old Gospel truths, yet Loehe was, to a certain extent, influenced by the modern theology of his time. Regarding the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry he held that the Church must be considered not merely as the Communion of Saints but also as a visible organization and the ministry as a special estate

vested with a certain authority over the congregation and with rights and privileges carefully to be guarded.

It is but natural that on account of these high-churchly tendencies Loehe should have been disappointed at the development of things in North America, especially since the very ministers he had instructed and sent to America began to accept the old Lutheran doctrine of the Church and the Ministry and to turn against their former teacher, whom otherwise they held in high esteem. As far as these men were concerned his plans had failed.

On the other hand he could not very well join hands with the founder of the old Buffalo Synod, Pastor Grabau, who in his losing fight with Missouri went to such extremes that co-operation with him seemed out of the question.

Thus Loehe finally decided to found a new synod which standing between the Missouri and the Buffalo Synod, should keep up fraternal relations with both.

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### **The Organization and Original Position of the Iowa Synod**

In Saginaw Co., Mich., where a number of congregations were flourishing two of the pastors sent by Loehe stood by the convictions of their master. For a while they were of the opinion that in spite of this doctrinal difference they might work in harmony with the Synod of Missouri, but in a truly Lutheran community this is out of the question; conflicting doctrines cannot remain peaceably side by side. Thus with the consent and under the guidance of Loehe a separation soon took place which led to the organization of the Iowa Synod in 1854.

This new church body was to be the American representative of Loehe's views. But a very short experience was sufficient to convince the founders of this synod that such an attempt must prove futile. Since the Iowa Synod in the first stage of its existence was entirely dependent on ministers which Loehe could send them its growth naturally could not but be very slow and it was soon evident that it never could develop into a self-supporting and prosperous church body if they would strictly adhere to Loehe's principles. Certain changes were inevitable and in the course of the following articles a number of them will be pointed out.

In place of a formal constitution two guiding principles (Stiftungsparagraph) were accepted, the first of which reads: "The synod accepts all the Symbolical Books of the Ev. Luth.

Church, because it believes that all their symbolical decisions of disputed questions which had arisen before or during the time of the Reformation were made in accordance with the Word of God. Since, however, within the Lutheran Church there are different tendencies, the synod declares itself in favor of that tendency which, by means of the confessions and on the basis of the Word of God strives toward a greater degree of perfection." ("Quellen und Dokumente" pg. 131. This and the other quotations from German sources were translated by the writer.)

The first impression one might get from these words is as though the Iowans did not only intend faithfully to adhere to the Lutheran Confessions but even strived to outdo Luther and the Lutheran Church-Fathers in clear knowledge and understanding of the revealed truth. But the results of doctrinal progress which were at hand by that time were apt to arouse some misgivings in the hearts of faithful Lutherans as to the character of the "greater degree of perfection" toward which Iowa was striving. The Missourians on their part were content with the humble task of confessing the truth of the Scriptural doctrine as set forth in the Lutheran Symbols, and to defend them against all old and new objections. This task, on account of the ever-changing forms of error and contradiction, is and will always be timely and necessary.

But there is another point even more serious. In its declaration of principles the Iowa Synod accepts the Confessional Books of the Lutheran Church, not simply because all doctrines of them agree with Scripture, but only "because it believes that all their symbolical decisions of disputed questions which had arisen before or during the time of the Reformation were made in accordance with the Word of God." Now Loehe and other modern theologians of that time were of the opinion that the hotly disputed questions concerning the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry were not definitely settled in the Lutheran Confessions, and that these questions, therefore, were still open for discussion among Lutherans. Only the error of the Romanists, thought they, was clearly and definitely rejected, but as to the questions of later origin the Lutheran Church of the future would have to find the answer. And since those theologians who had departed from the old Lutheran doctrine of Church and Ministry were by no means agreed among themselves, but harbored many conflicting opinions, the hope was entertained that one of these different views would finally prove to be the only correct solution, acceptable to the entire Lutheran Church.

This was also the hope of the Iowa Synod, as the above mentioned declaration shows, which, applied to the doctrine of Church and Ministry, means that the synod accepts what the Lutheran Symbols teach in opposition to the error of the Romanists, but hopes for more light as far as the modern controversies are concerned.

Since that time more than seventy years have passed. The hope for a new and better definition of the disputed doctrine, which would go beyond the contents of the Lutheran Symbols and yet be accepted by the whole Lutheran Church, has never been realized, nor will it ever come true, for the simple reason that the Lutheran Symbols in this respect really contain all that is necessary; and the only way for all Lutherans to come to an agreement would be to return to the plain Scriptural doctrine of our Symbolical Books.

The Iowa Synod, as already stated, was never able consistently to abide by the principles of Loehe, but being forced by prevailing circumstances, they came very near those of the Missouri Synod. Still a remnant of the old difference always remained.

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### The Present Difference

As far as the doctrine of the Church is concerned both sides agree in this that the Communion of Saints, the whole number of believers, is rightly called the Christian Church and that in this respect the Church is invisible. Nor is there any controversy about the so-called visible Church. We all agree in this, too, that in the midst of the visible congregations and denominations, also known as churches, there are always found hypocrites, such as merely pretend to be Christians. There is no quarrel about this visible Church, but about the nature of the invisible Church.

While we teach that this invisible Church is nothing but the Christians, Iowa is not yet ready entirely to give up the idea of Loehe and other Lutherans of Germany who held that this invisible Church at the same time must be visible also. Word and Sacrament are visible, and these means of grace, say they, evidently belong to the Church being a part of its essence.

We deny this. It is true, faith is created by Word and Sacrament, they are the means by which the Church is built, and at the same time the marks by which we can tell where the Church is to be found. Wherever Word and Sacrament are used there surely will be Christians, there is the Church.

But this does not prove that Word and Sacrament belong to the essence of the Church, just as little as the bread without which a man cannot exist belongs to the essence of man.

Scripture plainly tells us that the Church is an entirely spiritual and invisible kingdom. John 18, 36: My kingdom is not of this world. Luke 17, 20: The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation. 2 Tim. 2, 19: The Lord knoweth them that are His. Compare also Eph. 2, 19-22 and 1 Pet. 2, 5 where the Church is called a spiritual temple of the Living God whose stones are the Christians, or Eph. 5, 23-27 where the Apostle calls the Church the body of Christ, etc. But it cannot be shown from Scripture that this kingdom of God, this spiritual temple, at the same time is visible, that these visible means, Word and Sacrament, form a part of this spiritual body of Christ.

While we are teaching that the Church is nothing but what Scripture says it is, the Communion of Saints, "the Iowa Synod taught and is teaching that two sides of the Church must be distinguished, an internal and an external one. Looking at the Church and considering it internally the Church is the fellowship of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and this, of course, is its chief side (ihre Hauptseite). But it also has an external side (aeussere Seite) which here on earth can and dare never be wanting: it is also the fellowship of the Word and the holy Sacraments, and as such it is visible. It is visible and invisible at the same time." (From the German L. u. W. 1904, pg. 442.)

This declaration of Dr. Deindörfer is accepted in the Iowa Synod to this day.

Now perhaps a person may be inclined to ask: Is this difference really so very serious? Even if people imagine they can see the Church, why not let them do so? What great harm can this work for the Church?

It may seem so. Yet this departure from the plain Scriptural doctrine is by no means as harmless as it appears on the face of it. This conception of the Church is intimately connected with the difference in the doctrine of the Ministry, and here we must exercise utmost care and precaution lest we slide, little by little, into Roman channels.

What, then, is the present difference in the doctrine of the Ministry? Both parties agree that the ministerial office is not a merely human arrangement but a divine institution; both reject the Roman and Episcopal idea of an apostolic succession, and teach that the office is conferred by the Lord upon the ministers through the Church or the congregation. But since



we are not agreed upon the doctrine of the Church we necessarily also differ as to the manner in which the Church confers the holy office upon the ministers. And just at this point the fatal consequences of an unscriptural conception of the Church become apparent.

According to the Lutheran doctrine which is genuinely Scriptural, the power of the keys and the right and duty of calling and ordaining ministers of the Gospel is vested in the local congregation of believers. But according to the Iowa conception a number of Christians is not yet a Church in the full sense of the word, since the Church essentially is made up of two parts, the Christians and the clergy, as the representatives of Word and Sacrament. And since the keys are given to the whole Church (or as the Iowa theologians usually change these words, "to the Church in its totality") a congregation without representation of the ministry ordinarily has no right to call a minister.

The question here is not, if, in the event of a vacancy, it is **advisable** for a congregation to avail itself of the assistance and advice of neighboring ministers or officers of the Church; this, as a rule, is done in our synod also. But the question is, whether or not a congregation in such a case has the **right**, even without the assistance of the ministry, to call a pastor. This question is answered in the affirmative by our Missouri Synod, in the negative by the Iowa Synod.

To make a call valid in the Iowa Synod the Christians and the ministry **must co-operate**, and in order to save for the ministry this privilege they feel it necessary to hold to this definition of the Church as also having a visible side consisting in Word and Sacrament.

Dr. S. Fritschel in contrasting the Missouri and the Iowa position defines the latter thus: "We hold that the public ministry is conferred by God through the congregation in its totality and essence (in ihrer Ganzheit und Wesenheit) because the mandate to appoint ministers of the Church is not given to the single members, but to the Church as such." (Translated from the German, "Unterscheidungslehren" pg. 12.) The expressions, "the Church as such" and "in its totality" here do not mean all Christians, but the Christians together with the ministry.

This is the only way, they assure us, to safeguard the privileges and rights of the clergy and to prevent a mob rule in the Church. But Scripture knows nothing of such privileges, and while it is true that the rights of the congregations, like all Christian liberty, may be misused, this gives us no

right to change the Scriptural doctrine. Besides, experience has shown at all times that such high-handed methods in the Church, if not checked, very soon grow into tyrannical practices. Thus it was a step in the wrong direction, and a very grave one, when the Iowa Synod at its convention (Sept., 1858) decided, "that to those congregations that for invalid reasons (aus nichtigen Gründen), especially to save their independence, persistently refuse to join the synod, their pastor should be called away as soon as he would be needed in a congregation belonging to synod." ("Quellen und Dokumente" pg. 160.) Reading such a resolution the question suggests itself: What would the Iowa Synod have come to, had it not been for the testimony and watchfulness of their Missourian neighbors?

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### **The Ohio Synod and the Doctrine of Church and Ministry**

The Ohio Synod, organized in 1818, is considerably older than both the Iowa and the Missouri Synod. In the controversies concerning the doctrine of Church and Ministry between Missouri and Iowa, the Ohio Synod was not directly involved, but at the forming, in 1872, of the Synodical Conference by the synods of Ohio, Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, and the Norwegian Synod, these synods were agreed in all points of doctrine, including that of the Church and the Ministry. However, in later years, as efforts were being made to bring about a union between Iowa and Ohio, the representatives of the latter synod fell more and more in line with the tenets of the Iowa theologians.

A colloquy was held in 1883 at Richmond, Ind., and ten years later at Michigan City, Ind. It is interesting to observe the gradual progress of the Iowan element in the theses that were adopted at the various colloquies. Hardly any trace of the Iowan element can be noted in the theses of Michigan City (1893). The Iowans here agreed to a wording which, seemingly expressing the old Lutheran doctrine of the Church, could at the same time be explained in the sense of Iowa. It reads thus:

"A. The Church in the proper sense is the congregation of the true believers, created and edifying itself through the means of grace.

"B. As to its essence (Ihrem eigentlichen Wesen nach) the Church on earth is and remains invisible.

"C. The fellowship of the means of grace is a necessary manifestation (notwendige Erscheinungsform) of the Church

and an infallible mark of its existence." ("Kirchliche Zeitschrift" XXI, pg. 164.)

In these words seemingly nothing is said of the Church being visible and invisible at the same time, nor of Word and Sacrament belonging to the essence of the Church. Therefore out of their own midst protests were expressed as though the representatives of the Iowa Synod had sacrificed their own doctrine. But in a review of the proceedings at Michigan City, Dr. S. Fritschel shows in what sense the Iowa representatives had accepted this thesis. Never have the Iowans denied, he declares, that the invisible side of the Church is the main thing and the more important part. Only, the visible side in Word and Sacrament must not be **denied**. Nor is this done in the Michigan City thesis, since in the first sentence the means of grace are **expressly mentioned**. If this be done they see the visible side of the Church sufficiently safeguarded. ("Kirchl. Zeitschrift" XXI, pg. 161-170.)

Likewise regarding the thesis concerning the Ministry of the Word was taken within the Iowa Synod at the words: "The office of a minister or pastor is the power to publicly and in the interest of the congregation (von Gemeinschafts wegen) administer the means of grace, resting on a command of the Lord, given for all time and conferred by the call."

This sounds very much like the old Lutheran doctrine according to which the ministry is conferred upon the pastors simply by a congregation of Christians, a conception which always has been refused by Iowa, and well might we wonder how the colloquents of the Iowa persuasion could prevail upon themselves to accept this thesis. But again Dr. S. Fritschel tells us in which sense the various expressions were meant on their part and then concludes with the words: "This thesis, therefore, although in Missourian phraseology, does not state anything besides what the doctrine of the Missourians and that of the Lutheran Church" (rather of the Iowa Synod) "have in common, for one thing that every true Christian by virtue of his spiritual priesthood has the right to cause the means of grace to be used (Die Gnadenmittel in Brauch zu setzen), and for another thing that the public administration of these is a power resting on a special command of the Lord which He has given to His Church and which He confers upon the ministers of the Word through the call." ("Kirchl. Zeitschrift" XXI pg. 168.) In other words, although the thesis sounds very much like the Missouri doctrine the wording is shaped so that the Iowa meaning also can be found in it because it covers only the common ground and evades the

difference. This goes to show that we cannot be too careful in compiling theses that are intended as a basis for Church fellowship. Every word should be weighed carefully to see if perhaps the old error may be hidden by skillfully dodging the real difference.

In this case, however, as Dr. Fritschel assures us, the representatives on the Iowan side had left no doubt as to the sense in which they would have the words in question understood, which stamps the theses of Michigan City as unionistic pure and simple, for they were intentionally so worded that both sides could find in them their own meaning.

Still at that time the fraternal relations between these two synods were not yet definitely established. This was accomplished fourteen years later at Toledo, Ohio. That there is but one step from silently tolerating an error to expressly acknowledging it may be seen from the Toledo thesis concerning the Church. The first two parts are the same as in the Michigan City thesis, while to the third part the words are added: "and in so far the Church is visible."

By this additional clause in plain, unmistakable words the doctrine of the Iowa Synod is expressed that the Church is invisible and visible at the same time, that a congregation without the ministry, as the representatives of Word and Sacrament, is not a Church in the full sense of the word. In the light of these words the thesis concerning the Ministry also, which otherwise would admit both, the old Lutheran and the Iowa conception, can be understood in the latter sense only. Herewith the Ohio Synod has officially accepted the Iowa doctrine of Church and Ministry.

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### False and True Agreement

To conclude this chapter the question may be discussed: What is necessary to bring about a true and real agreement in the doctrine of Church and Ministry? It would be an easy thing to compromise with Iowa on a formula which both sides could acknowledge as correct. What they insist upon in this matter is that the means of grace, Word and Sacrament, must be expressly mentioned in the definition of the Church, as is the case in the thesis of Michigan City. If this is done they take it for granted that the visible side of the Church is acknowledged.

Now in itself there is nothing wrong with the statement that the Church is created and built up by the means of grace.

In our Confessional Books this truth is often stressed against the Romanists; we also teach the same truth and yet we know that thereby a visible side of the Church is proved just as little as if we would say: "From the things that are created we can perceive the existence of God, hence the invisible God at the same time is visible to us." There is no sense in such a conclusion.

But since Iowa insists on such an addition merely because by these words they see their doctrine of a visible side of the Church conceded, and since they would accept no definition of the Church in which the means of grace are not mentioned, as e. g. that found in our Synodical Catechism, it would not be right to agree with them upon such a formula which could be understood in both our and their sense. This would not mean an agreement in the truth but only an outward union without unity of doctrine.

Even if we were of the opinion that this is not a serious difference, not of such importance that it should prevent church fellowship—even in that case we should frankly say so; but never under any consideration should we try to hide a doctrinal difference under words that admit a double meaning.

On the other hand, we should not forget that very often there is a grain of truth hidden in an error. If this is detected and carefully defined and guarded against any misconception, the pointing out of such hidden grain of truth sometimes goes a long way in helping to clear up the situation and to further a mutual understanding.

Occasionally the remark was made by Iowa spokesmen that all they want to express by speaking of a visible side of the Church is that the Holy Ghost within the Church through Word and Sacrament performs His work; in this, and in this sense only, they would call the Church an institution of salvation (Heilsanstalt).

Now nobody denies that the Holy Ghost through Word and Sacrament performs His work in the Church; but if this whole establishment whereby Word and Sacrament are put in operation is called "Church," then evidently this word is used in an entirely new and different sense from that which is found in Scripture and in our Lutheran Symbols, just as we use this word in a different sense when we call a house of worship a church, or even the service is sometimes called church. And taken in these new and different senses, such a church is indeed visible, although not visible and invisible at the same time.

But we cause great confusion, if, in presenting the doctrine of the Church, we start out with the Scriptural conception of the invisible Church, the Communion of Saints, go on by mixing with this conception an altogether different thing which is visible, call it likewise "church" and then conclude by declaring that "this Church" therefore, is invisible and visible at the same time!

Let us define our terms, plainly stating in what sense we are using the word "Church," and everything will be clear. This seems to be the only way that suggests itself for solving the problem at this point of the controversy. If it is clearly understood that the Church as the Communion of Saints, as Scripture and our Confessional Books use the word, is invisible, since it is an **article of faith** that there is and always will be a number of true believers on this earth, there is nothing in the way to admit that a church, the word used in an **altogether different sense**, as for a church building, or for an institution of salvation, is visible, and that in the latter sense it includes Word and Sacrament.

But if we are agreed on this point that, strictly speaking, the Church is nothing but the invisible Communion of Saints, that Word and Sacrament do not belong to the Church in this sense, then the last prop supporting the idea that a congregation has the power of the keys only in conjunction with the ministerial office falls and we shall easily agree in the doctrine of the ministry also.

To sum up:

A. The Church in the strict and Scriptural sense of the Word is nothing else but the invisible Communion of Saints, whose existence can be known only by faith. Wherever it is stated that the church is visible, the word "church" is not taken in its strictly Scriptural but in a wider sense; or something else than the Communion of Saints is called church.

B. Since the keys are given by Christ to the whole Church, i. e. to each and every believer, without exception, the establishment of the ministry, instituted by the Lord, within a congregation comes about in this way that the Christians who form such a congregation confer the public administration of the keys in their midst, belonging to all of them, upon one or more.

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## II

### OPEN QUESTIONS

### What Is an Open Question?

In this chapter we are dealing, strictly speaking, not with a doctrinal difference, but with a principle which, nevertheless, is of vital importance due to its bearing on all the doctrinal differences under discussion.

During controversies it sometimes happens that a certain expression is employed by the disputing parties for divergent meanings. It stands to reason that such a lack of uniformity in terms cannot but cause much confusion and misunderstanding in the course of a doctrinal controversy. This has been the case in the controversy on "Open Questions." In order to disentangle the complication of puzzling and conflicting opinions it will be necessary to set forth the **original** meaning of this term and its usage in the language of the Church.

What, then, is an "Open Question?" This expression has been in general use not only in the language of the Church, but in every day life also, and has the same meaning in all languages. The literal sense of this term is: a question not yet definitely answered and decided, not yet closed. In this sense the expression is generally used in science, in business, in politics, and in the speech of every day life.

In this sense the term has also been used in the Church and by the theologians. But here, of course, it makes a world of difference from what source a certain denomination derives its doctrines. In the Roman Catholic Church it is not the Scripture that decides about truth and error, but the Church. And by "Church" they do not mean the Christians but the bishops with the "infallible" Pope as their head. Hence with them everything must be an open question which has not yet been definitely decided by the Church or the Pope.

Not so in the Lutheran Church which stands wholly and solely on Scripture as the only source and rule of doctrine. Scripture alone determines articles of faith, and decides all questions of Christian faith and life. Therefore a matter established in Scripture can never be an open question to us, even though it be mentioned merely incidentally or in one place only, no matter whether the Church in its public Confessions touches that point or not.

There are, indeed, questions which are not definitely answered in the Bible: e. g., What was the first sin of the fallen angels? Did Judas participate in the first Lord's Supper? Who were the brethren of Jesus, mentioned John 7, 5 and elsewhere? Many questions may be asked concerning heaven and eternity which the Bible does not answer. Such and simi-



lar questions which in this life can never be definitely answered, because Scripture does not answer them, are rightly called **open questions**.

Nor must the fact be overlooked here that the Lutheran Church has publicly confessed its faith over against the errors of the Romanists and others, and has laid down and defended its teachings in its public Confessions or Symbolical Books. These Symbolical books are the voice of our Church. From them friend or foe may see what is truly Lutheran doctrine. And a Lutheran is a Christian who accepts the contents of these books, comprehended in Luther's Small Catechism, as his own creed; not, indeed, as if he based his faith on these human writings, but because all articles of faith contained in them are taken from Scripture.

It is evident, then, that to a Lutheran no doctrine can be an open question which is confessed in our Symbols. By treating one of such doctrines as an open question he would disagree in this point with the Lutheran Confessions and in so far no longer be a true Lutheran.

Whatever, therefore, is plainly revealed in Scripture, or is laid down in our Confessions as a doctrine of the Lutheran Church, cannot possibly be regarded as an open question by a Lutheran. All this is very plain and easily understood, nor should any difficulty ever have been raised among Lutherans in this matter.

But there came a time when even within the Lutheran Church the authority of the Scriptures was called into question and their clearness denied. As a result the opinion gained ground as though the various doctrines, instead of being taken from Scripture, were a product of conflicting ideas of theologians; that during controversies, arising in the Church from time to time, the true doctrine would gain recognition and become a part of the public Confessions of the Church, in a manner as though a doctrine were gradually formed by a process of evolution and the surviving of the fittest. Instead of the Pope, according to this idea, the theologians, the scholars of the Church, are those who definitely decide about truth and error. The mere thought that plain Christians, business men, mechanics, farmers, etc., should have the right and ability to judge the doctrine is ridiculed by those theologians. Nobody but themselves, they thought, has this right. But over against such arrogance of fallible men who think that they have the privilege to set articles of faith we should keep in mind that the whole saving truth is once for all laid down in the revealed Word of God for all Christians; and all

we have to do is to accept, to confess, and to defend against all opposition what God tells us in His Word.

However, those who believe in a kind of evolution of the Church-doctrine through the efforts of the theologians during the time of controversies will naturally have a different conception of open questions. To them all those doctrinal questions will be open that have not yet sufficiently passed through a conflict, and therefore have not yet been decided upon by the theologians and are not yet embodied in the public Confessions of the Church. This, accordingly, is the sense in which the term "open questions" was used by the so-called modern theologians of the nineteenth century.

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### The Iowa Synod and Open Questions

In the Iowa Synod the meaning of the term "open questions" underwent a change corresponding to the historical epochs of this synod. In the first period they sided with Pastor Loehe, regarding as open questions such points of doctrine which were not yet definitely decided in the Confessions of the Church, but still left open, maintaining that in such points conflicting opinions must be tolerated until the Lutheran Church would definitely settle those questions.

A conference assembled at Fuerth, Bavaria, in September, 1853, to which Pastor Loehe belonged, wrote the following to the Synod of Missouri: "Unanimously we hold the question concerning the ministerial office to be an open one and wish that in North America, also, it might be regarded and treated as such." ("Qu. und Dok." pg. 216.) And what they meant by open question may be seen from their own words: "In regarding the question concerning the ministry as open we do **not** consider it as an **immaterial question**, but it seems to us worthwhile under constant calling upon the Holy Spirit and on the ground of the divine Word to search for an ecclesiastical expression **being above all in conformity with Holy Writ** and excluding the error of the Romanists as well as that of the enthusiasts. We do not doubt—if only we take the Word of God as our only guide in all things—and understand our good Confessions according to the directions of Scripture and in the light of the opposition to be fought in each case (dem jedesmal bekämpften Gegensatz gegenueber) that the Spirit of truth will in **these questions** guide His Church unto all truth." ("Qu. u. Dok." pg. 217.)

Although Scripture is mentioned in this letter as the only source of doctrine, yet the writers are of the opinion that in the doctrine of the ministry, as far as the present controversies were concerned, the Lutheran Church had not yet found the right answer, and the certain hope is expressed that such an answer would, undoubtedly, be found in the future. But it was just this seeking for a new term in the doctrine of the ministry to which the Missourians objected, because the statements of the Symbols, in this doctrine also, are very plain, clear, and Scriptural, covering even the points disputed by the modern theologians; but by the attitude of Loehe and the conference at Fuerth this Scriptural doctrine of our Confessions was called into question on account of the modern controversies.

Loehe dared to lay the blame for the discrepancies among the modern Lutherans on the authors of our Confessional Books. While admitting that they had ably refuted the Roman errors, he goes on and says: "Their own positive doctrine of the Church and the Ministry, however, did apparently **not turn out** to the satisfaction of all concerned (Ist nicht so gelungen, dass man allerseits hätte zufrieden sein können). Even the doctrine of the Symbols in this point is not so decisive that differences of opinion in the Church were rendered impossible. Or whence the differences?" ("Qu. u. Dok." pg. 222.) It did not seem to occur to him that the fault might lie with the modern Lutherans who found it so difficult to harmonize the plain statements of the Symbols with the principles and prevailing conditions in the state churches.

Keeping in mind this attitude of Loehe we shall not be surprised to find the same principles concerning open questions in the early period of the Iowa Synod. Says Inspector Grossmann in an address delivered in 1855: "Certain as it is that the Church has not yet spoken and therefore symbolically decided on all points in the sphere of the divine truth, but that there is yet light to be cast on many a point which to this day lies beyond the knowledge of the Church, even so certain it is that the Holy Ghost is able to give **new light** in recent times concerning such doctrines as already have been in controversy and have been decided in one way or the other." ("Qu. u. Dok." pg. 225.)

Here we have the same opinion expressed, that the doctrines of the Church and the Ministry (for these are meant in the words just quoted) have not yet been sufficiently discussed in Church controversies, and that for this reason the

differences in question have not yet been symbolically fixed, but the true light must still be found.

The very term "open questions" is defined thus in 1858: "after all this, it will not do for us to deny beside the doctrines symbolically fixed a sphere of theological knowledge with open questions which are not yet ecclesiastically and symbolically answered, because the Church cannot symbolically fix anything which has not yet passed through a conflict and has thereby become a vital question for it." ("Iowa and Missouri" pg. 132.)

This is the modern conception of open questions pure and simple.

In 1859 the term "open question" is defined "as a question on which no symbolical decisions have yet been laid down in the Confessional writings of our Church, and therefore both views must be allowed to stand side by side in the Church." ("Qu. u. Dok." pg. 263.)

But Iowa even followed in Loehle's footsteps openly denouncing the doctrinal statements of our Symbols as insufficient. As late as 1861 Inspector Grossmann in an address quoted the following words of Prof. Hengstenberg: "New conditions give rise to new questions, and not always shall we find in the Symbolical writings a perfectly satisfactory answer. The doctrines of the Last Things, of the Descent of Christ into Hell, which for the proper insight into the truth total (*Gesamtwahrheit*) of the Gospel is not unimportant, the doctrine of the Sacraments, their relation to the Word of God and their specific operation, the doctrines of the Church and the Ministry, lately so much put in the foreground, are treated but insufficiently." Of these words Grossmann says, that although taken amiss by the Missourian "Lehre und Wehre," they expressed the innermost thoughts of every Iowan. ("Einem jeden von uns aber aus der Seele gesprochen") "Qu. u. Dok." pg. 246.

All these declarations show that up to that time, as far as open questions are concerned, there was absolutely no difference between the German theologians of the 19th century and Iowa. It was on account of utterances like these that the Iowans were severely taken to task by their Missourian opponents.

But in the course of years a change took place. It would never do for Iowa to use the unsteady and wavering attitude of modern theology as a weapon against the staunch confession-alism of the Missourians. They also wanted to be good Lutherans.

But now they had great difficulty in trying to keep up their former principles and yet to escape the reproach of clinging to the modern conception of open questions. In order to understand the way out of the dilemma into which the Iowans saw themselves forced it will be necessary first to discuss another subject, which, though to some extent related to open questions, must not be confused with, but carefully distinguished from, the former subject.

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### **Differences Preventing or Not Preventing Church-fellowship**

This section does not deal with the question: What does Scripture reveal to us, and what is not yet revealed? But the question which now occupies our attention is: When is it necessary to deny Church-fellowship to a person or to a Church body?

In a general way the rule is very simple: False doctrine has no right whatever in the Church, and persistent adherence to a false doctrine finally leads to severance of Church-fellowship.

But in the practical application of this rule we sometimes encounter some difficulties. The question arises: How far shall we go in applying this principle? All doctrines contained in Holy Writ are not of the same importance. There are truths which are indispensable for our faith, and again there are other truths which a person may be ignorant of and yet believe in the Gospel and be a good Christian, and there are points incidentally mentioned in Scripture which do not seem to have any bearing upon the faith and the life of a Christian.

Now the question arises: Is each and every difference, even in such a subordinate point, of sufficient importance to justify a breach in the Church? It is easily seen that in that case the divisions and schisms in each denomination would go on indefinitely; for owing to the weakness of our spiritual faculties and our lack of understanding it will happen again and again that even Christians who agree in all points of doctrine will disagree in such points which have no bearing on the foundation of the saving truth. Now evidently it would be a violation of Christian love to deny Church-fellowship to a brother who in such a subordinate point is found wanting.

However, if it is agreed that **not each and every disagreement** is a sufficient cause for breaking off Church-fellowship and yet false doctrine must not be tolerated in the Church of

God, nor Church-fellowship maintained with such as adhere to false doctrine, where are we to draw the line?

It must be admitted that we cannot lay down a rule covering all cases; because circumstances, in this matter also, often alter a case. For instance, if a person would harbor a wrong idea concerning the angels, this would not necessarily affect his faith in the Gospel; but if on this occasion it would appear that his error were merely the outgrowth of a false notion concerning Christ, or the work of salvation, or if in the course of the discussion he would disregard plain Scripture texts contradicting his opinions, the whole matter would at once gain a more serious aspect.

Although each case must be considered and dealt with individually, yet it can be said in a general way that even the outward unity of the Church is a blessing so greatly to be desired that Church-fellowship must not be severed on account of each and every little discrepancy that may arise, but only if in some way the foundation of our Christian faith is affected. (1 Cor. 3, 11; Eph. 2, 20; 4, 3.)

To illustrate: At the first glance the modern Romanizing doctrine of Church and Ministry may not seem to affect the Gospel truth; yet, if consistently carried through, it leads to the pernicious Roman error adulterating the whole Gospel. And since a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump, the evil must be resisted in the beginning.

This, then, is the distinction to be made between open questions and differences not preventing Church-fellowship; open questions are questions which are not answered in Scripture while differences not preventing Church-fellowship are such differences as do not necessarily lead to a separation in the Church. It goes without saying that a mere open question, the word used in the above sense, can never be a cause for denying Church-fellowship to anybody. But on the other hand there are differences which do not necessarily prevent Church-fellowship and still are by no means open questions, because they can be answered from the Word of God. All this shows that it would be a great mistake simply to mix up these two terms and to say: Open questions and differences not preventing Church-fellowship are one and the same thing.

But this is just what the Iowans did. When they could no longer shut their eyes to the fact that the modern theory of open questions is untenable, and yet desired to maintain their distinctive doctrines as open questions, they declared: For us an open question is nothing but a question not preventing Church-fellowship; and whoever is discussing doc-

trinal questions with us should keep in mind that we use the term "open questions" only in this special sense.

The advantage gained by this change of front is easily seen. By silently dropping the definition of open questions as points of doctrine not yet symbolically fixed by the Church; and only urging that other feature that open questions do not prevent Church-fellowship (which nobody denies), they gained a two-fold object. They could continue declaring their doctrine of Church and Ministry to be an open question and at the same time escape the old reproach of attributing to the Church the power to establish articles of faith. For now as ever they declare that the doctrinal differences concerning the Church and the Ministry, and a few other questions, do not prevent Church-fellowship. As to this point they have never changed their attitude.

Now nobody can forbid the Iowans to coin their own expressions and to differ from the phraseology commonly used in the world and in the Church; but they should not expect everybody to know this, nor must they be surprised if all manner of confusion and misunderstanding arise from their peculiar mode of expression. This is but the natural result if a Church body purposely departs from the common usage of language.

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### The Ohio Synod and Open Questions

Not much is to be said on Ohio's attitude toward open questions. The Ohio Synod did not directly participate in the controversies between Missouri and Iowa and the thesis agreed upon between Ohio and Iowa at Toledo is rather vague. Though under the caption "Open Questions" various statements are made which no true Lutheran will dispute, the term "open questions" itself is not defined, nor is it stated whether the term is meant in the usual sense or in that of Iowa.

The thesis reads:

"A. All doctrines clearly and plainly revealed in the Word of God are, on account of the unconditional authority of the divine Word, definitely settled and binding on the conscience (endgültig entschieden und gewissensbindend) whether they are symbolically fixed or not.

"B. No departure whatever from clearly revealed Scriptural truths has any right in the Church, whether they contain fundamentals or non-fundamentals, important or seemingly unimportant matter.

“C. Complete agreement in all articles of faith is an indispensable condition for Church-fellowship. Persistent error in an article of faith under all circumstances brings about severance of Church-fellowship.

“D. Complete agreement even in non-fundamental doctrines though it may not be attained on this earth, must nevertheless be striven for as the goal.

“E. Those who knowingly, persistently, and stubbornly contradict the Word of God, if only in subordinate points, thereby overthrow the organic foundation of the Church and are therefore to be excluded from the fellowship of the Church.” (“Qu. u. Dok.” pg. 324.)

Each of these statements, taken for itself, is indisputable, but the fact that in this thesis the distinction between open questions and differences not preventing Church-fellowship is obscured, and both subjects are intertwined strongly suggests the Iowan conception of the term “open questions.”

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### How to Solve the Problem

At this point also we must guard zealously against a mere bridging of the dissension. When in 1867 representatives of the Missouri and Iowa Synods held a colloquy at Milwaukee, first of all the attitude regarding the Symbols and open questions was discussed. At that time the Missouri representatives had great difficulty in ascertaining which of the doctrines contained in the Symbols the Iowans wanted to acknowledge as binding, and just what they meant by the term “open questions,” their declarations being so vague and ambiguous. Yet when the colloquists of both sides agreed on the principle that all articles of faith (Glaubenslehren) found in the Symbols were binding, this seemed to be a notable success and a decisive step toward a complete agreement. But soon the matter appeared in quite a different light when the Iowans acknowledged as articles of faith only those points in which they already agreed with Missouri, excluding the differences which remained just as before. Thus in reality nothing had been gained. The brothers, S. and G. Fritschel, afterwards wrote of the principle agreed upon at Milwaukee: “The sentence really is nothing else but the old Iowan principle regarding the Confessions (Bekennnisgrundsatz) in Missourian mode of expression, which we willingly admit to be more convenient than ours. And we are not so foolish as to reject anything



better because it comes from an opponent." ("Iowa and Missouri" pg. 100.) Such utterances should caution us to be very careful.

Still an understanding on this point should not be impossible. Even the Iowans are not at all agreed among themselves regarding open questions. Some of their own spokesmen have perceived that their peculiar use of this term forces them into an awkward position, and therefore they propose to drop the expression "open questions" entirely.

But we need not go to that length. There really is no reason why we should outlaw this term which has been in common use in the world and in the Church, and which by no means is dark or ambiguous but very plain and clear. If only we do not darken the matter by confusing this term with other things of a different nature, but leave it in its original and natural sense, the greatest difficulty will have been removed. We may then be of a different opinion as to whether certain points of doctrine are to be regarded as open questions or not; but even in trying to settle this difference of opinion a clear understanding of the term "open question" will be indispensable.

To recapitulate the main points of this chapter:

According to the common use of language an open question is a question which is not yet definitely answered and decided. In connection with the Christian doctrine, therefore, only such points can be called open questions which are not decided in Scripture; while for a Lutheran no question of doctrine can be open which is, on the ground of Holy Writ, answered in the Symbolical Books of our Church. It is self-evident that a mere open question,—the word used in the sense just mentioned,—can never be a cause for severing Church-fellowship. This can be done only on account of real differences in Scriptural doctrines.

An agreement on these principles would bring us much nearer to the desired unity in faith and doctrine.

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III

MILLENNIUM AND ANTICHRIST

## A MILLENNIUM

### Loeche's Attitude

Not only among the Jews of old, but also within the Christian Church, time and again, the idea sprang up that before the end of the world there would be an era of earthly glory for the Church of God. Christ Himself would visibly appear on this earth to crush the Antichrist, and for His followers a season of glorious reign and triumph over all enemies would begin lasting a thousand years, when, after a short interval, the last day would lead them to final glory in heaven.

This doctrine which up to the present hour is taught in many sectarian churches is called chiliasm or doctrine of the millennium. (See "Conc. Cyclop." pg. 128 and 471.)

Loeche formerly was opposed to such fantastic notions, and taught that the last day might appear at any time. During an illness, however, the thought took hold of him that the hope for a thousand years of glory before the last day would, in these days of sore distress, be very comforting and cheering for the Christian Church. So in a sermon on Phil. 3, 7-11 he openly professed his faith in a millennium.

The hope of the Christians, according to this doctrine, is not directed primarily to the coming of Christ on the last day. Not for this event should they look and wait every day, but, first of all, for His coming to establish a kingdom of glory for a thousand years here on earth.

Even close friends of Loeche's who held him in high esteem publicly warned against this departure from the Lutheran doctrine, and showed how such hope of a millennium must pervert the faith of the Christians and draw their thoughts away from a blessed eternity to an earthly glory. His friends in this country also were grieved. Wynecken who sincerely loved Loeche exclaimed: "The grief over this dear man cuts a Lutheran to the heart." (Hochstetter pg. 284.)

Since during the first period of its existence the Iowa Synod was made up of disciples of Loeche, for a few years all of their ministers believed in a millennium. But in this respect also, after a while, a change took place. It would not have been possible to build up a Lutheran Synod consisting of millenarians exclusively. Already in 1858 the first members were received into Synod who did not believe in a millen-

nium and were even opposed to this doctrine. Since that time the proportion has shifted more and more in favor of the non-millennarians. Yet to this very day within the Iowa Synod this doctrine is, in a more refined form, publicly confessed, e. g. in an article by Dr. Reu, "Kirchliche Zeitschrift," July, 1926.

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### The Millennium and the Augsburg Confession

In the 17th Article of our Augsburg Confession the doctrine of a millennium is rejected with the words: "They condemn also others, who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the godly shall take possession of the Kingdom of God, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed." (St. L. pg. 14.)

In this **coarse** form the millennium was taught by the Anabaptists at the time of the Reformation. Now these outright material expectations of a **worldly** kingdom and the destruction of all godless people were never defended in the Iowa Synod. It is a **finer** and more subtle form of a millennium that is taught by them. And, since the refined forms of this error are not especially mentioned in the Augsburg Confession, they feel assured that their doctrine cannot be refuted with the Lutheran Symbols. Only such ideas of a millennium are permitted in the Iowa Synod which do not conflict with the words of the Augsburg Confession.

A few cases in point may illustrate their attitude. One feature of the millennial hope is the bodily resurrection of all believers at the beginning of the thousand years. But this is in direct opposition to the Augsburg Confession which expressly states, in conformity with the Third Article of our Creed, that "At the consummation of the world, Christ will appear for judgment, **and will raise up all the dead**; He will give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys." (St. L. pg. 14.)

Therefore the doctrine of a resurrection of **all** believers before the last day is rejected in the Iowa Synod, but the idea that a **certain number of martyrs** will be bodily raised from the dead is admissible in their midst. This idea, they say, does not contradict the words of the Confession.

Another feature of the millennium is the conversion of all Jews throughout the world, after which Jerusalem is to be the center of the world and the Church. This doctrine of a general conversion of Israel concerning the flesh is not especially mentioned in the Augsburg Confession, because the

Anabaptists never stressed this point, hence it is defended in the Iowa Synod. But it is easily seen that all these ideas are, in truth, nothing but a more subtle form of that error rejected in the Augsburg Confession. By all such dreams, even if the coarsest features are avoided, the view of the Christians is diverted from the blessed eternity to a better time for the Church here on earth; sound Lutheran Christians cannot warm up to such fantastic expectations.

In a later section it will be shown that, after all, no form of a millennium, be it ever so subtle and hidden, can be harmonized with our Confessions.

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### Millennium and Scripture

While the attitude of the Iowans toward the Confessions, as far as the millennium is concerned, is easily understood, their utterances in this regard concerning the Scripture are full of contradictions and cannot be brought into harmony.

In a paper read at their convention in 1861 the essayist terms the attitude of the Iowa Synod regarding the doctrine of the millennium "a strong soundly-biblical realism" (einen kernigen, gesund-biblischen Realismus) and that of the other Lutherans who reject the doctrine of the millennium, "a windy spiritualism" (einen windigen Spiritualismus) ("Qu. u. Dok." pg. 260.

What do they mean by these terms? "Biblical realism" means that the words of Holy Scripture—in this case especially prophetic passages—are taken in their literal sense. The word "spiritualism" has no reference to the ghost and spook-seeing of the so-called Spiritualists (or better Spiritists) but to the figurative interpretation of certain Scriptural passages.

Thus e. g. it was a sound Biblical realism when Luther in the doctrine of the Holy Supper stood firmly on the words: "This is My body, this is My blood," not permitting any figurative explanation to turn him away from the literal sense of these words. And it really was a windy spiritualism, when Zwingli and others tried to weaken the strength of these words by a spiritual explanation, as if they meant nothing but: This signifies My body, this signifies My blood.

That the Iowans meant these expressions (Biblical realism, and windy spiritualism) in exactly this sense is seen from other utterances. Time and again they say that they have "drawn this doctrine from God's clear and plain Word." ("Qu. u. Dok." pg. 262.) This doctrine of the millennium is

to them "firmly grounded in the Word of God" (pg. 266). Such and similar assertions are found plentifully in their older writings.

Now if they were sure of their ground and fully convinced that the doctrine of the millennium is clearly revealed in the Word of God, then certainly it would have to be an article of faith to them for this is not a matter of precept for the life of the Christians, not a part of the divine Law, but something which, according to the opinion of the millenarians, all Christians, on the ground of plain Scriptural texts, must believe in, and hope for. Even if they do not count this doctrine among the great chief parts of the Christian Creed, still, according to their own words, it is to them a part of the Christian faith and hope,—unless they do not mean what they say. If the rejection of this doctrine is "windy spiritualism," if it is only by misinterpreting plain Scripture texts that the belief in the millennium can be avoided, as they assert, who gives them the right to sanction such misuse of Holy Writ and to declare that both convictions, the millenarianism and the antimillenarianism, **have equal rights in their Synod?**

Luther who was perfectly certain on the ground of Scripture that his doctrine of the Lord's Supper was right, steadfastly refused to join hands with those who would not accept the plain Word of God and did never acknowledge them as brethren; so sure was he of his ground that unto the last he clung to his word: "You have a different Spirit from ours."

But Iowa, on the one hand, declares that the belief in a millennium is "firmly grounded in the Word of God" and on the other hand: "We treat this doctrine of the last things as an 'open question,' i. e., as such a one in which we may differ without disturbance of Church-fellowship. From what has been said it appears that we do **not stamp our conviction as an article of faith** which everybody under any circumstances must accept." (1. c. pg. 263.)

How can they do this? How can they dispense from what, according to their conviction, is clearly taught in the Word of God? How could the staunch millenarians join hands in 1858 with the strict antimillenarians telling them thereby: "Your windy spiritualism is just as good as our Biblical realism?" For it must not be overlooked that the Iowans by no means only **tolerate** in their midst the opposite conviction; no, both of them, the millenarianism and the antimillenarianism, have **equal rights** in the Iowa Synod. This very feature is typical of the spirit of this synod, as will be seen from the following quotations.

"It is not as if those who reject the millennium were only tolerated with their different opinion." ("Iowa und Missouri" pg. 21.)

"So much, then, was in any case evident, and was also acknowledged by both the brethren, that the Synod could not be accused of teaching the millennium, but only of giving room in their midst to the millenarian conviction in equal manner with the contrary minded." ("Iowa und Missouri" pg. 24.)

"This is the condition which we desire—millenarianism and antimillenarianism, as long as the former does not violate a real article of faith of the Church, nor is claimed to be an article necessary for salvation, or grows into enthusiasm, have equal rights over against the Confession of the Church" (Haben beide gegenüber dem kirchlichen Bekenntnis gleiche Berechtigung) "Iowa und Missouri" pg. 25.

It is evident then that the millenarians in the Iowa Synod are not so sure of their "Biblical realism" as Luther was in the doctrine of the Sacrament. The reason why they are not, and never **can** be certain, will be shown in the following section.

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### Prophecy and Fulfilment

If we want to arrive at any positive result in this controversy about the Last Things, it will be necessary, first of all, to settle a few principles of Bible exposition which are of consequence in this question.

It is perfectly right, and a rule generally accepted, that in expounding a text of Scripture we must abide by the literal sense of the words in question, demanded by the context and the common usage of language, unless Scripture itself indicates that certain expressions or phrases are not meant literally, but in a figurative sense. It is due to this principle that in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, and in other doctrines, we have no right to depart from the original and literal sense explaining the words of institution figuratively.

But it is different in prophetic passages, when events are foretold which will be fulfilled in the distant future. Here Scripture itself gives us a different direction. In prophecies many things are dark, and are meant to remain in a certain darkness until the time of the fulfilment. It is the fulfilment that sheds the full light, in which prophetic words are perfectly clear and plain. By comparing prophecy with fulfilment we gain the full understanding of prophetic passages. And for this very reason, because up to the time of the fulfil-

ment the prophecy is to remain in a certain dusk or semi-darkness, the Holy Ghost in the Old as well as in the New Testament very often has clothed it in figurative language.

Thus it was with the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ and His Kingdom, the Christian Church. Wherever the New Testament explains the somewhat dark passages of prophecy it shows us how those figurative expressions are meant, and the more diligently and carefully we compare the prophecy with the fulfilment, the better we learn to understand the figurative language of the prophets.

It was the great mistake of the Jewish Rabbis and scribes to interpret the figurative language of the prophets concerning Christ and His Kingdom literally. On the ground of those grossly misunderstood prophecies they were looking for such a Messiah as would establish a great earthly kingdom of Israel, outshining the glory of the time of David and of Solomon, a kingdom in which the Jews would rule over all nations and lead a life of luxury and ease such as this world has never seen. And all this on the ground of the figurative language of the Old Testament prophecies, which the Jews in their carnal mind understood literally. And when the real Messiah had come, when these prophetic words had been fulfilled, and the full light was shining, when Christ had come to save sinners from death, to bring them forgiveness of sins, the grace of God, and everlasting life in heaven, when He had come to establish a spiritual Kingdom, His Christian Church, then those Jews did not recognize Him, they despised and rejected such a Messiah, because in their wilful blindness they were waiting for a literal fulfilment of the old prophecies.

Now should we Christians, God's children of the New Covenant, repeat the grave mistake which once so blinded the eyes of the Jews that they rejected their own Messiah? Should we forget that the prophecy often uses figurative language? Should we, by taking the prophetic passages of the New Testament literally becloud our view and draw our expectations away from the spiritual goods which our God has in store for us, turning them to an era of earthly splendor and glory, or at least to a better time for the Church on this earth? All those Bible texts which tell us that the Church on this earth will always be a cross-bearing Kingdom should guard us against such gross misuse of the prophetic words.

Keeping this in mind we shall see that it is misleading to apply the term "clear Scripture" to the **literal explanation** of prophetic texts, whose fulfilment is sought far away in the future. Without the light added by the fulfilment there is so



much in these passages which is not yet understood, so much darkness mixed with the light that over against the clear and plain texts these may be compared to the dawn of the morning rather than to the light of the noon day.

This, therefore, is the reason why the millenarians are not, and cannot be sure of their ground. They may have, at best, an honest human conviction, as is brought about by human argumentation and demonstration, but which is always fallible; but they have no divine certainty, created by the Holy Ghost through the simple and plain Word of Scripture. This explains to us why the Iowa Synod gives equal rights to these two conflicting opinions. Those that are certain of their doctrine on the ground of Scripture can never do this. They may bear weaknesses and defects in Christian knowledge, but never give **equal rights** to conflicting doctrines.

The millenarians find their main proof text in the 20th chapter of the Revelation. It would be out of the way for us to offer here a detailed exposition of this chapter, nor is this necessary. It will suffice for our purposes to refer to the fact that there are only two possibilities. The one is that those prophecies are not yet fulfilled, and in that case there is not sufficient clear Scripture to prove the doctrine of a millennium, because without the light of the fulfilment we cannot be certain of our interpretation. The other is that those prophecies are already fulfilled, at least, to a great extent, and in that case these words can be explained in the light of the fulfilment. This latter position is held by most of the orthodox Lutheran expositors.

Only in passing it may be mentioned that no one can cling to the literal sense of those passages without doing violence to the words of the text. Take e. g. the conversion of Israel. If at the beginning of the millennium all the Jews then living were converted, this would only be a comparatively small part of the **whole Israel**, but not "**all Israel**" as we read Rom. 11, 26.

On the other hand, all is plain when we keep in mind that Scripture itself makes a distinction between Israel after the flesh, the descendants of Abraham, and the true spiritual Israel, the believers (Rom. 9, 6-8). The latter, the true spiritual Israel, evidently is meant when the Apostle says, that "**all Israel**" will be saved, for **not a part** of the true, spiritual children of Abraham are saved, but **all** of them.

Likewise Rev. 20, 4 where the millenarians find the bodily resurrection of the martyrs, **not bodies**, but "**souls** of them that are beheaded" are mentioned.

## B

# THE ANTICHRIST

### The Point of Controversy

The Lutheran Church is by no means the only one which holds that the prophecies of Scripture concerning the great Antichrist are fulfilled in the Pope at Rome. In other Protestant Churches, unless their view is obscured by the hope of a millennium, or by modernism we find the same conviction. Even before the Reformation the antichristian character of the Pope was recognized and fearlessly confessed by a few men who clearly saw the corruption of the Church under the Pope.

The chief marks of the Antichrist are given 2 Thess. 2. They are: The falling away from the Gospel, the sitting in the temple of God, the Christian Church, the exalting himself above all human and divine authority, and deceitful signs and wonders. (Cf. "Concordia Cyclopedia" pg. 26f., and Pieper, Dogmatik III pg. 528ff.)

These characteristics are so plainly to be found in the Pope that he who knows the papacy cannot help seeing the fulfilment unless he is prejudiced against this truth and has a special interest in dating the appearance of Antichrist in the future.

The Lutheran Confessions, therefore, positively declare that, on the ground of Scripture, there can be no doubt that the Pope is the great Antichrist. To quote only one passage, the Smalc. Articles say: "And the marks (all the vices) of Antichrist plainly agree with the kingdom of the Pope and his adherents: For Paul, 2 Ep. 2, 3, in describing to the Thessalonians Antichrist, calls him **an adversary of Christ, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God,**" etc. (St. L. pg. 153.)

Now to put the point of controversy in the right light, the Missouri Synod does **not** say (as has been erroneously stated), that the Pope alone and exclusively is the Antichrist (S. Fritschel, Unterscheidungslehren pg. 25-28). We know very well that in a wider sense there are many antichrists (1 John 2, 18) and we also often use the word "antichristian" in this wider sense for anything which is opposed to the Gospel.

Again, from what has been said, it must not be taken that Iowa **denied** the antichristian character of the Pope. No, in the same general sense, in which we Missourians acknowledge many antichrists, the Iowans admit that the Pope is one of these many.

The controversy rather hinges on the question: Whether or not the Pope, as is taught in our Lutheran Symbols, is **that great Antichrist, foretold in 2 Thess. 2.**

The main reason why this part of Lutheran doctrine is either denied or doubted by Iowa is their regard for a millennium. With the manifestation of the Antichrist, according to those expectations, the millennium is to start. Therefore those who are waiting for a millennium cannot possibly admit that Antichrist has already come and has been revealed as such by the Reformation. The millenarians within the Iowa Synod, therefore, **deny** that the prophecy, 2 Thess. 2, is fulfilled in Popery.

Expectations of a millennium, and the belief that Antichrist has already appeared, positively exclude each other. And thus in all those numerous passages of the Lutheran Confessions in which the Pope is declared to be the Antichrist any kind of millenarianism is indirectly rejected.

But there are many members of the Iowa Synod, in fact, they are now in the great majority, who do not share any millenarian expectations. These admit that the prophecy 2 Thess. 2, is, to a certain extent, fulfilled in papacy, and on that account they are ready, for the time being, to regard the Pope as the Antichrist. But this is by no means final. They expect that perhaps in the course of time another enemy of the church may arise, worse than the Pope, an enemy in whom the prophecy will be more literally fulfilled. If such a one will come, he will be the real and last Antichrist and the Pope only his forerunner.

Thus, even if the various shades of opinions within the Iowa Synod be taken into consideration, the following question remains as the precise point of controversy: Can we state with any certainty that the prophecy concerning the last great Antichrist, 2 Thess. 2, is fulfilled in the Pope, or not? This question is answered in the affirmative by Missouri, but in the negative by all Iowans.

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### The Scriptural Proof

There is one objection often raised on the part of the Iowa theologians, that requires special consideration. They say, a Scriptural proof for the Lutheran doctrine of the Antichrist can not possibly be produced for the simple reason that Scripture nowhere says that the Pope is the Antichrist. Therefore the evidence must be taken from history, and historical evidence can never be acknowledged as Scriptural proof.

But such an objection does not prove anything because it proves too much. For if this rule should obtain that in prophetic texts the fulfilment always must be added to gain a Scriptural proof, then the prophecies and warnings of Scripture concerning Antichrist would be altogether worthless, because in this way the true Antichrist could never be known and proved as such. Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, those people were right who are looking for the Antichrist to appear in the far future. Now if this their Antichrist would come, why, even then the Christians would be in the same position having no Scriptural proof, because the Bible would not say of that Antichrist either, that he is the one.

But there is another reason why that objection does not hold good. The proof taken from the comparison of prophecy and fulfilment is actually Scriptural proof, acknowledged by the Bible itself. In fact, it is the only Scriptural proof there is in such cases.

Even the Iowans will not deny that the Apostles proved to the Jews from Scripture that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah; for we all know that this is expressly stated in the Book of Acts. When Peter preached his powerful sermon on Pentecost day he produced the Scriptural evidence for the fact that Jesus is the Messiah by comparing His suffering, death, and resurrection with the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning Him. And those three thousand who were baptized did not say: "You take your evidence from history; show us from Scripture that Jesus is the Christ." No, they accepted it, as it really was, as Scriptural proof. Acts 9, 22 we read: "But Saul increased the more in strength and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is the very Christ." Chapter 18, 28 we read of Apollos: "For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ." And all this, although in the whole Old Testament there is no text, telling us with so many words: Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah.

Of this demonstration, comparing prophecy and fulfilment, the Apostles made constant use in their preaching of Christ, and that certainly was valid Scriptural proof. Therefore, when we have proved that in popery each trait of the picture drawn in the prophecy is fulfilled, we have produced conclusive evidence and a valid Scriptural proof that the Pope is the Antichrist foretold in Scripture.

But now, if a Christian would say: "I am not yet fully satisfied that the prophecy concerning Antichrist is really fulfilled, I have my doubts if all those features really agree with those foretold in the Bible,"—how should we deal with him? In that case we Missourians really are not such rigorous people, as we are often represented to be, that we should have no patience with such a brother and should sever fraternal relations with him. Even a Christian who otherwise faithfully clings to the Word of God may not have sufficiently examined this matter to form a definite opinion, especially if he is not yet thoroughly acquainted with the history, the ways, and the evils of popery.

But if there are other causes for such a doubt, as e. g., the idea of a millennium, then the case is more serious; then this cause must first be dealt with.

But although much patience may be had with those who err in such non-fundamental articles of faith, yet under no circumstances can we consider such doctrines as the millennium and Antichrist to be open questions. Neither must we treat them as questions which are not decided in Scripture and in the Lutheran Confessions, nor give equal rights to the two contradicting opinions in the Church.

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### Position of the Ohio Synod

In the Ohio Synod, in former years, and recently also, much good testimony has been borne against every kind of millenarianism and for the Lutheran doctrine of the Antichrist. Therefore it is deeply to be regretted that in the Toledo thesis concerning the millennium the Iowa position is expressed. It is true, the idea of a millennium seems to be rejected with great emphasis in the first part of the thesis. It reads:

"A. Every kind of millenarianism which turns the Kingdom of God into an external and worldly realm of glory, and teaches a resurrection of all believers before the last day is to

be rejected as a doctrine being in striking contrast to the analogy of faith." ("Quellen und Dokumente," pg. 343 f.)

But if we take into account that only the **coarse** millenarianism is rejected in these words, and a resurrection of **all** believers before the last day, which the Iowans have never advocated, it appears that nothing is gained by such a declaration in which Iowa only rejects what it always has rejected.

But the so-called subtle millenarianism, this finer shade of error, is expressly declared as admissible in the second part of the thesis. It reads:

"B. The assumption that the ruling of Christ and His saints, prophesied Rev. 20, is to be expected in the future and that under the first resurrection, mentioned in that passage, a bodily resurrection is to be understood, although not in contrast to the analogy of faith, still can not be strictly proved from Scripture, just as little as the spiritual explanation." (pg. 344).

In other words: Neither the subtle millenarianism nor its rejection can be proved from Scripture. Neither side can be certain of its ground, and therefore both opinions must have equal rights in the Lutheran Church. If you believe in a millennium you must not preach it as **certain Scriptural truth**, if you reject it, you must not declare it to be a **false doctrine**.

This certainly is not the standpoint of Old Ohio, but the later position of the Iowa Synod which differs from the declarations of the earlier period only in this that now they no longer refer to "clear Scripture," but to dark Scripture.

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### Summary

In summarizing the main principles set forth in this chapter the true Lutheran and Scriptural position in the question concerning the millennium and Antichrist will present itself thus:

Since in the Old as well as in the New Testament prophecy frequently uses figurative language, which, to a certain extent, is, and is meant to be, dark until the time of the fulfilment, such prophetic passages of Holy Writ can be fully understood and used as clear Scriptural proofs only after they have been fulfilled and the agreement of prophecy and fulfilment can be shown. On the other hand, the evidence produced by showing the full harmony of the fulfilment with the prophecy is to be acknowledged as conclusive evidence and valid Scriptural proof. Hence:

A. The expectation that before the last day Christ will rule with His saints here on earth for a thousand years and bring about a better time for the Church, that all the Jews, then living on earth, will be converted, and that before the general resurrection a number of martyrs will be raised from the dead: cannot be proved by clear Scripture and has, therefore, no right in the Church.

B. The doctrine of the Lutheran Confessions that the Pope is the last great Antichrist, foretold in 2 Thess. 2, is firmly grounded in Scripture, since all the marks of Antichrist, given in Scripture, tally with the claims and the ways of the Pope.

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IV

THE SUNDAY QUESTION



## Erroneous Opinions and Scriptural Doctrine

Regarding the Sunday question a hopeless confusion prevails in the various churches of this country as well as in other Christian lands. This chaos makes it the more necessary for Lutherans to take a firm, clear, Scriptural stand in this matter.

The Roman Catholics claim that the Pope, as Christ's vicar, has the right to change God's commandments. Therefore, although God has ordained Saturday as a day of rest—say they—the Pope, as a visible God on earth, has changed the day, and since he has appointed Sunday, instead of Saturday, all Christians have to observe that day. It is not necessary to comment on this antichristian error.

The Reformed sects, as the Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists and others, hold that not the Pope, but God Himself has changed the day. They say that God has ordained the seventh day for the time of the Old Testament and the first day of the week for the New Testament.

Justly the Seventh Day Adventists and other Sabbatarians challenge them: Where is this written? Where in all Scripture can one text be found telling us that God ever changed the day of rest from the last to the first day of the week? It is a fact that such a statement cannot be found in Scripture. Therefore the Sabbatarians at once jump to the conclusion: consequently the Sabbath commandment is in force for our days also and forever, as long as the world stands. They accuse the Christian Church of having made a great mistake in putting the Sunday in place of the old Sabbath. Saturday, they say, is the only proper day to celebrate for the whole Christian Church. This day should be observed, just as it was commanded to the Jews, by abstaining from all work.

Over against all these erroneous opinions stands the clear statement of our Augsburg Confession which says: "Those who judge that by the authority of the Church the observance of the Lord's Day instead of the Sabbath-day was ordained as a thing necessary, do greatly err. Scripture has abrogated the Sabbath-day; for it teaches that, since the Gospel has been revealed, all the ceremonies of Moses can be omitted, and yet because it was necessary to appoint a certain day, that people might know when they ought to come together, it appears that the Church designated the Lord's Day for this purpose; and this day seems to have been chosen all the more for this additional reason that men might have an example of Christian liberty, and might know that the keeping neither of the Sabbath nor of any other day is necessary." (St. L. pg. 25.)

Here it is stated in plain, unmistakable words that the Sabbath was commanded to the Jews only, and for the time of the Old Testament, but is now abolished, just as all other Jewish ceremonies, and that God has not ordained any day as Sabbath in the New Testament. The opinion that our Sunday takes the place of the Old Testament Sabbath is expressly rejected as an error. The Sunday was rather appointed by the Church in **Christian liberty** in order to have time and opportunity for public worship. This, and nothing else, is the Lutheran doctrine concerning Sunday.

Therefore the Third Commandment in our Catechism does not read "Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy," etc., which form was meant for the Jews only, but: "Thou shalt sanctify the holy-day." And what is meant by these words Luther explains by saying: "We should fear and love God that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it."

This Lutheran doctrine concerning Sunday is firmly grounded in Scripture. Even in the Old Testament we do not read that God ever commanded the heathen to keep the Sabbath or that heathen nations were reprov'd for breaking the Sabbath, as they were for other sins, as idolatry, witchcraft, fornication, etc. Nor do we find any trace in the Bible of one of the patriarchs and the saints of the Old Testament ever keeping the Sabbath before the time of the exodus from Egypt. In fact, when the Sabbath commandment was given it was stated time and again that this commandment was an institution meant for Israel only. So e. g. Exodus 31, 13, 17 the Sabbath is called a sign between God and the Children of Israel. Mark also how carefully the prophet Ezekiel distinguishes between the moral law, those commandments which are binding upon all men, "which if a man do, he shall even live in them," and the Sabbath as "a sign between Me and them." (Ezek. 20, 10-13, v. 21.)

Accordingly in the New Testament the Sabbath is counted among the ceremonies which are no longer binding. Col. 2, 16: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy-day, or of the new moon, or of the **Sabbath days**, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." And to those Christians of Jewish extraction who were of the opinion that they should continue to celebrate the Sabbath, the Apostle writes: "One man esteemeth one day above another; another esteemeth **every day alike**. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

(Rom. 14, 5.) These Words leave absolutely no room for a divinely appointed Sabbath in the New Testament.

There is one passage, however, which calls for special consideration, because it is often quoted to prove that the Sabbath commandment is meant for all men, and that, if not the seventh, at least one out of seven days must be kept as a day of rest. Gen. 2, 2, 3. we read: "And on the seventh day God ended His work which he had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made." But if this passage were to prove that Sunday, or at least one day out of seven, must be kept, the argument would run thus: Because God rested on the **seventh day** and sanctified the **seventh day**, we must celebrate the **first day**, or **any other** day of the week. Surely a queer specimen of Scriptural proof.

But not even the seventh day is instituted in this passage as a day of rest for all men. Seventh Day Adventists and others who find in these words a proof for their doctrine usually overlook the fact that these words were written by Moses in the wilderness **after the Sabbath commandment had been given to Israel**. They must not be taken as if penned immediately after the creation. Written after the Law had been given on Sinai, these words do not say more than e. g. the passage Exod. 31, 17: "It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and on the seventh He rested and was refreshed." All that can be proved from passages like these, as M. Chemnitz already points out, is this: When God appointed a certain day of rest to His people of Israel, He chose the seventh day because He Himself had rested on that day. This disposes of the only Bible text to which Sabbatarians might refer with a certain show of right, and so the Lutheran doctrine concerning Sunday stands as founded in Scripture.

For further information see J. Th. Mueller: "Shall we Christians of the New Testament keep the Old Testament Sabbath?" and "Concordia Cyclopaedia," "Sabbath" pg. 669ff.

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### Aberrations from the Lutheran Symbols

To understand the controversy which arose in the American Lutheran Church regarding the Sunday question the following must be known: Toward the end of the sixteenth

century, when the Formula of Concord was drawn up, the Lutheran Church was not yet vexed by the Sabbath question. Later on, however, a few theologians, among them the noted Joh. Gerhard, began to depart from the doctrine of Scripture and the Augsburg Confession. They fostered the opinion that, although the celebration of the first day of the week was not directly commanded by the Lord, still the celebration of one day out of seven, instead of the Jewish Sabbath, was a divine commandment for all men.

How this error could arise is easily seen. Since the days of the Apostles, throughout all the centuries, Sunday had been celebrated in the Christian Church, so that it seemed there must be a divine command for this institution. Once the idea had been conceived, it was but natural to look around for Scriptural proof for it. We have already seen that this conception of Sunday contradicts Scripture as well as the Lutheran Confessions, and as a matter of fact those dissenting theologians were emphatically reprov'd by their faithful brethren and their error was exposed. Never did the orthodox theologians of that period admit this departure from the Lutheran doctrine as having the same right with the doctrine of Scripture and the Lutheran Symbols.

But this is just what Iowa insists upon as the only proper course to be taken. Whereas again and again, since the seventeenth century, the opinion was defended by Lutheran theologians that one day out of seven must be celebrated by divine command, and, whereas, these men were never excommunicated from the Lutheran Church, therefore, they say, this difference must now be treated as an open question, and the two conflicting opinions must have equal rights in the Church. This attitude always was intolerable to the Missourians. They would not have a clear Scriptural doctrine be called into doubt and thereby made an open question.

Strictly speaking, then, not so much the doctrine concerning Sunday itself is the bone of contention between Missouri and Iowa, but rather the question how the divergent doctrine of some Lutheran theologians is to be regarded and dealt with; whether it is to be rejected as a departure from Scripture and our Symbols or to be granted equal rights with the doctrine of Scripture and of the Lutheran Confessions. In this question Missouri stands for the former, Iowa for the latter principle.

This difference is of vital importance, because a principle of far-reaching consequences is at stake. For if this rule is to obtain that a departure from Scripture and Symbols must

be granted equal rights with the pure doctrine because great teachers of the Church have erred in this point, then soon no part of the doctrine will be certain any longer, then, in the course of time, we should be forced to yield one truth after the other; for there was a time when almost all theologians, more or less, departed from the pure doctrine, and rationalism swept like a whirlwind over the Church. Here, therefore, the first beginnings must be firmly resisted; we must steadfastly cling to the principle: Whatever is plainly taught in Scripture and in our Confessional Books, and nothing else, has the right of way in the Lutheran Church. The Scripture and the Symbolical Books are the only safeguard there is for Lutheran Christians against all false doctrine. Without it they soon would be at the mercy of the theologians, just as the Christians in the Church of Rome are in the power of the Pope. Ample proof for this is furnished by the modernist preachers in the sectarian churches.

But imagine the confusion caused, in a controversy like this, by using the term "open question" in a different sense from the usual on the part of the Iowans. For many years the main point of the dispute was whether the doctrine concerning Sunday is an open question or not. The Missourians in maintaining that this doctrine must not be treated as an open question, of course, meant to say, since Scripture and Symbolical Books in plain and unmistakable terms set forth this doctrine it must not again be questioned, as if one point were not yet settled. Even the question whether or not one day out of seven must be kept by divine command, is closed for true Lutherans.

The Iowans, on the other hand, in classifying the Sunday doctrine with the open questions meant to say that the doctrine of J. Gerhard and other theologians must not be treated as an error preventing Church fellowship, but both doctrines should have equal rights in the Lutheran Church. They ridiculed the Missourians saying that they would have excluded even a man like Gerhard, just as if we used the term "open question" in the Iowa sense.

Now the Sunday doctrine does not belong to the great saving doctrines necessary for salvation. It is not the Gospel that is involved by this controversy, at least not directly, but a part of the Law, the Third Commandment. Therefore as early as 1867, the Missourians had told the Iowans at the Milwaukee colloquy that on account of this difference alone they would not go as far as denying Church-fellowship to a Lutheran; if he were correct in all other doctrines, they could bear with a brother that erred in this point only.

Yet the Iowans wanted more than this. The error that Sunday, or at least one day out of seven, were to take the place of the Jewish Sabbath should not be tolerated as a weakness, but should have **equal rights** with the doctrine of Scripture and the Symbols. But this the Missourians were not ready to concede, because here a principle of greatest importance is at stake, namely that for a Lutheran minister all clear Scriptural and Symbolical doctrines are binding.

But while in former years the Iowans took the position that the teaching of the Augsburg Confession regarding the Sunday question did not belong to those doctrines that are binding, they now prefer a somewhat different distinction. While in former times they admitted that the doctrine of the Missouri Synod regarding the Sunday question is the same as that found in the Augsburg Confession, they now say that in one point it goes beyond the Confession. The question which came up in the seventeenth century, whether or not one day out of seven must be kept by divine command, they say, is not definitely settled in the Augsburg Confession. All that can be proved by the Symbols, according to Iowa, is that the Sunday was not directly instituted by the Lord, and this without any doubt must be accepted as Lutheran doctrine, whatever lies beyond this truth — e. g. the question whether one day out of seven must be kept — they do not include in the sphere of **doctrine** but of **theological science**. This distinction is to be discussed more thoroughly in the two following paragraphs.

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### The Toledo Thesis Regarding Sunday

At Toledo the Ohio and Iowa Synods agreed upon the following thesis:

“Since the doctrine concerning Sunday contained in the Symbols is an article of faith revealed in the Word of God it must not be excluded from the sphere of binding doctrines” (Aus dem Kreis des Verbindlichen). In addition to this the Iowans had the following statement put on record:

“From this doctrine concerning Sunday contained in the Symbols we distinguish the more detailed theological exposition (die weitere theologische Ausführung) regarding the question whether or not the celebration of one of seven days of the week belongs to the moral part of the Third Commandment, which question with the orthodox teachers of the Church was a subject of divided opinion. The negative answer to this question, according to our understanding, is indeed a correct conclusion from the doctrine of the Symbols, but since this is neither ex-

pressly stated nor intended in the Symbols nor has the character of an article of faith, we cannot acknowledge it to be a binding part of the symbolical doctrine nor can we see in the contrary opinion a departure from the symbolically binding doctrine." ("Qu. u. Dok." pg. 350.)

The most interesting feature of this declaration, as far as we are concerned, is the circumstance that here not only the doctrine of J. Gerhard, and others, but also the opposed doctrine, as held in our Missouri Synod, is treated **as an addition to the doctrine of the Symbols**. Only what our doctrine and Gerhard's **have in common** is acknowledged to be the doctrine of the Lutheran Confessions! With this declaration, indeed, everything is retracted which seemed to be conceded in the thesis itself. First the Iowans say that the doctrine of the Lutheran Confessions concerning Sunday is binding. Now the statement "that the keeping neither of the Sabbath **nor of any other day** is necessary," is found in just these words in the Augsburg Confession. And still they insist that this point does not belong to the binding part of the Confession. This certainly is saying "yes" and "no" to the same thing. A Lutheran who knows that this part of the doctrine is taken from the clear Scripture cannot but see a glaring inconsistency between the thesis and the Iowan addition.

Still the Iowans are not ready to admit a contradiction in their words. On the contrary, they think that in this very point they make a clever distinction between the doctrine of the Symbols on the one hand and the more detailed theological exposition on the other hand. And if we want to get at the root of this matter we cannot be spared the somewhat tiresome task of analyzing this distinction and putting it in the right light. But this necessitates a special section.

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### Christian Knowledge and Theological Science

The terms, "theology, theological, etc.," in some quarters are used nowadays in a very different sense from ours and that of the old Lutheran Church. Therefore, first of all, the question must be answered: What is theology, and what is a theologian? A theologian is a Christian who has studied the Scriptures and is well versed in the Scriptural truth, so that he is able publicly to teach the Biblical truth and to defend it against the gainsayers. This ability, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, is called theology. In a wider sense this expression also denotes the whole sphere of doctrine taken from Holy Writ. Hence true theology is concerned merely about such truths as are clearly

revealed in Scripture. "Whatever is not Biblical," our Fathers used to say, "is not theological."

It is evident that, as long as this conception of theology prevails, a theologian can never usurp any authority over the faith of the Christians, since everything he teaches must be proven by Scripture, and the Bible is in the hands of the Christians. Besides, by the Symbolical Books of our Church at any time a certain doctrine may be tested whether it is a Lutheran doctrine or not. Of course, if Christians are not sufficiently interested in the pure doctrine to search the Scriptures and the Symbolical Books of their Church, then anything may be presented to them as "pure doctrine" without their noticing the deceit. This, then, is their own fault. But he who wants to form his own judgment in all questions of Christian doctrine and life only needs regularly to read his Bible and the Symbolical Books of our Church so as to get familiar with their language, and compare with them everything which claims to be Lutheran doctrine.

That the Christians have a right to prove by the Scriptures the teaching of their ministers is seen from the fact that even the Apostles who were guided into all truth by the Holy Spirit were not above this rule, but admonished the Christians to examine their teaching. 1 Cor. 10, 15: "I speak as to the wise men, judge ye what I say." Acts 17, 11 the Christians at Berea are commended for their daily searching the Scriptures whether the things preached by Paul agreed with the Word of God.

This sense of the word "theology," however, and the principle that nothing is theological which is not Biblical, was given up by the modern schools. The days came when the theologians wanted to be scientists and theology was claimed to be a science like philosophy, jurisprudence, history and other sciences, which do not base their results on divine revelation but merely on reason, observation, and experience. Thus the so-called Rationalists no longer took Scripture as the rule in all matters of faith but human reason. The result was that they soon rejected the Gospel and all Christian doctrines.

At the time of the re-awakening of the old faith during the first part of the nineteenth century the modern Lutheran theologians again made an attempt to return to Scripture as the source of Christian faith and knowledge; still they did not consistently accept the divine revelation as the **only** source of theology. Accommodating themselves to the conception of theology as a science they now tried to distinguish between such things as are based on Scripture and must be believed on the authority of Holy Writ, and such as are added by the "theological science," as though the theologians were able, to a certain extent, to go



beyond the Scripture and to find out things which God has not revealed!

Thus e. g. Loehle says: "We must well distinguish between formulas, articles of faith, which in long controversies, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, have been established and proved as fully Scriptural in the crucible—and between **human additions**, conclusions and inferences built **on them**, which gradually are rounded off to a **finished completeness**, which is called theology, **theological science**." ("Qu. u. Dok." pg. 235.)

Here, then, human additions to the Scriptural doctrine are called theology and theological science. So completely the modern theologians did break with the old principle, "Whatever is not Biblical is not theological."

This digression was necessary to throw the proper light on the Iowan distinction between a symbolical doctrine and the theological exposition of it. What do they mean by this distinction? If they do not take the word "theological" in the old Lutheran, but in the modern sense, then, of course, the contradiction which otherwise lies in their words, disappears. But this makes matters only worse, for now their words mean that we must distinguish between that which is taught in Scripture and the Symbols on the one hand, and that which belongs within the sphere of theology on the other hand. Scripture and Symbols teach that Saturday is no longer to be kept as day of rest, and that God has not appointed exactly the first day of the week. But the question whether or not any day out of seven must be kept as day of rest belongs within the sphere of theology. This question, which a common Christian cannot answer on the ground of Scripture, must be left to the judgment of the theologians who for centuries have not been able to agree among themselves.

If this were the case then the common Christians would indeed be in a difficult position. For this question is one of great practical importance. There are factories and other industries which cannot stop for one day in the week. But if those were right who claim that one day out of seven must be kept as a day of rest **by divine command**, then such Christians who have to work on Sundays and make no day out of seven a day of rest would break a divine commandment, and commit an outright sin.

Now if the decision of this vital question were to be left to the theologians then such Christians would be in a critical position, they would be kept in uncertainty and doubt until the theologians would come to an agreement.

When Luther once was told that he ought to wait until the Church (the Catholic theologians) would have decided about a

certain doctrine, he said: "Let the devil wait for that, I will not wait so long." No, neither the Pope, nor the Church, nor the theologians, nor even the Lutheran theologians, have any right to make decisions in matters of doctrine, but the holy Scripture alone establishes articles of faith. And where Scripture is silent about a certain question, even the wisdom of a theologian is at an end. Every Christian, however, has the right and the duty to draw from the very source, and to ascertain the truth in all questions of doctrine and life.

As to the Sunday question we have already seen that Scripture has decided definitely that a Christian **does not sin** if he fails to keep a special day and "esteemeth every day alike."

It is hardly necessary to mention that those who, instead of hearing the Word of God, seek pleasures, or attend to work on Sunday which might just as well be done at any other time, are sinning against the Third Commandment. And he who cannot avoid working on Sunday must somehow find time to hear the Word and partake of the Sacrament or he will come to grief and lose his own soul.

And now, if the Iowans really want to make this modern distinction between Christian knowledge, taken from Scripture, and theological science, as human additions to the Scriptural doctrine, then the difference that remains stands thus: We Missourians firmly maintain that the whole doctrine concerning Sunday is fully covered by plain statements of Scripture and our Confessions, while the Iowans hold that one point of importance for the conscience of a Christian, namely the question whether or not one day out of seven must be celebrated by divine command, is not yet decided in Scripture and in our Symbols and hence the theologians must be at liberty to answer this question either in the affirmative or in the negative. How in the meantime the conscience of a Christian who is troubled by this question may be set at ease, would then remain for the Iowans to explain.

On the other hand, if they do not want to make this ill-timed distinction of modern theology, but abide with the old principle, "Whatever is not Biblical, is not theological," there is hardly any other way, if hopeless contradictions are to be avoided, than to confess with us: **Scripture and our Symbols teach plainly that the Jewish Sabbath has been abolished and that to the Christians no day of rest is commanded by the Lord; Sunday, therefore, is kept by them in Christian liberty, because for their services which are held by divine command a certain time must be set. The opinion that, by divine command, one day out of seven must be kept as a day of rest is contradictory to the doctrine of Scripture and the Symbols.**

V

THE DOCTRINES OF CONVERSION  
AND ELECTION

### Introductory Remark

The controversy about these two doctrines has produced a flood of literature in the American Lutheran Church. So great is the number of books, pamphlets, magazine articles, and papers written on this subject and so manifold the disputed points raised in the course of time that it would be quite a task to review the entire range of this controversy. But fortunately we need not enter into a discussion of all the many particular questions that were raised and argued. There is one point, however, which from the very beginning was, and to this day is, the very centre of the argument. An agreement on this point would close the argument as far as the doctrines of conversion and election are concerned.

This point is clearly and distinctly set forth in the very first statement on the part of Missouri which was assailed by Iowa. This statement is found in "Lehre und Wehre," June, 1871, and is quoted in Brobst's "Monatshefte," 1872, pg. 23. It reads thus: "Lutherans do not want to explain why it is that, since all depends on God's mercy, resistance and death is taken away in some men while others are lost. They drop this question."

Over against this statement Prof. Gottfr. Fritschel who discussed the L. u. W. article declared: "It is not true that the Lutheran Church leaves unanswered the question why in some men death and resistance is taken away, in others not. It is not true that Lutherans drop this question. . . . The Lutheran Church answers it by a doctrine of which they would not be robbed at any price, adhering to which is of infinite importance and significance to them, the doctrine of the wilful resistance of man." ("Monatshefte," pg. 80.)

These two statements, diametrically opposed to each other, at the very outset point out clearly the ever recurring, though sometimes disguised, difference. This difference is the reef on which many attempted reconcilements suffered shipwreck.

It is, therefore, historically incorrect to say that in this controversy, originally, only the doctrine of the election or predestination was at issue, and that the Missourians afterwards dragged in the doctrine of conversion. The fact is that throughout the controversy on predestination there was no moment in which the doctrine of conversion was not likewise disputed. This is but natural since these two doctrines are inseparably connected with each other, so that an error in one of them invariably affects the other. For this reason, and because the difference in the doctrine of election cannot be explained and understood without that of conversion, we shall first discuss this latter difference.

## A CONVERSION

### The Scriptural Doctrine

The main points of this doctrine are well known to our Christians from Luther's explanation of the Third Article of our Christian Creed. That no man is able to convert himself by his own strength our Catechism states with the words: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him."

This is the doctrine of Holy Writ which tells us that man by nature is spiritually **blind**. 1 Cor. 2, 14: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." That man is spiritually **dead** we read Eph. 2, 1: "And you hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." And still worse, the natural man is **an enemy of God**, so that he hates things spiritual, Rom. 8, 7: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God."

Now conversion is such a change in the heart, mind, and will of man that a sinner who has been aroused to a consciousness of his guilt through the Law of God accepts the Gospel of Christ as divine wisdom and trusts entirely in the grace of God which grants him forgiveness of all sins and eternal life as a free gift.

This change in the heart of a sinner, however, is entirely a work of the Holy Spirit, as we confess in the Third Article: "But the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts."

This is also plainly taught in Holy Writ. 1 Cor. 12, 3: "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." Eph. 2, 8: "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that **not of yourselves**, it is the **gift of God**," and Acts 16, 14 says of Lydia who had been brought to faith in Christ, "whose heart the **Lord opened** that she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul."

So far everything is plain and simple. But now the difficulty begins. The question arises: If all men are by nature spiritually dead and unwilling to believe the Gospel, if our conversion is entirely the work of God, why is it that not all hearers of the Word are converted? Does not God desire to save all men? Is not the Holy Ghost willing to create the saving faith in the hearts of all? Most assuredly, Scripture tells us positively:

"God will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of truth." (1 Tim. 2, 4) and many other texts testify to the same truth. That many people, in spite of their hearing the Gospel, remain unconverted is entirely their own fault. Matt. 23, 37: "And ye would not." Acts 7, 51: "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost."

Thus throughout the Bible the fact that some are converted is ascribed solely and entirely to the grace of God, while the fact that others remain unconverted, in spiritual blindness and death, is ascribed entirely to the evil will and the resistance of man, since God wanted to convert the ones just as well as the others. If the Christians of all times would have been satisfied with this information which Scripture gives us and let the matter rest at this point, there would never have been a controversy about the doctrine of conversion.

But the trouble is that there always have been, and there always will be Christians who have not learned to be silent where Scripture is silent, but want to be wise beyond that which is written. Human reason will always argue along these lines: If the grace of God were the only cause of conversion, why, then, all men would be converted, for God wants to save all men, or on the other hand, if the evil will of man were the only obstacle, then either all men or none at all would be converted, for the natural will of man is equally wicked in all; they all resist the Holy Spirit. Here evidently something must be wrong, human reason argues, either God does not earnestly mean all men, or else there must be a difference in the conduct of man over against the divine grace; otherwise the fact that some are converted and saved while others are not remains unexplained. Hence we must assume either a difference in the will of God, or a difference in the conduct of man as the deciding factor.

Thus the speculating along these two lines started and has continued throughout all the centuries, since the time of the ancient Christian Church up to our days. In the age of the Reformation, in this way, Calvinism and Synergism arose, both of which need some further consideration.

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### Calvanism

John Calvin, after Zwingli, the chief founder of the Reformed Church, tried to explain the difficulty by teaching that it was never the will of God to save all men, but that from eternity He has predestinated some men to eternal salvation and the

rest to eternal damnation. Only those that are predestinated to life, according to this doctrine, have a chance to be converted; but if once converted they can never lose their faith. The others who are predestinated to eternal perdition, if they hear the Word, hear it in vain; even if they are called by the Gospel, God does not really desire to convert and to save them, since Christ never died for them, but only for the elect. The Gospel is not meant for them. In such Bible texts as tell us that God loved the world, that He wants to save all, etc., by the word "world" or "all" only the elect are meant.

This Calvinistic doctrine was modified in the course of time so as to smooth off the most offensive features. In fact, the later Reformed Confessions, in their mode of expression, come very near the Lutheran doctrine, without, however, giving up the main principle of the Reformed thoughts. They admitted that God wants to save all men. The Scripture texts stating this truth are indeed so powerful that in the long run they could not be set aside. But now they taught the universal grace of God was not sufficient to convert and save a sinner, that it was not an efficient will to perform what is necessary for salvation, but merely an inactive complacency of God.

The mildest form in which Calvinism has shown itself is this conception: It is true that God wants to save all men and He really is in earnest about it, but the fact that some are converted when the Word of God is preached while others are not, is to be explained by a difference in the divine will; in some the gracious will of God works stronger than in others, and only in the elect it works with a strength sufficient to effect conversion and salvation. (Comp. Niemeyer, Conf. Marchicae III, pg. 650, 674.)

Although the universal grace of God is not denied here and even a certain power is ascribed to it, yet evidently a two-fold will of God is stated, one sufficient and one not sufficient to bring about conversion and eternal salvation. This finest shade of Calvinism sounds very reasonable; still it is unscriptural, and Christians should be on their guard against such thoughts. If the grace of God embracing all men is **insufficient** to convert and save a sinner, if a stronger and more efficient will must be added in order to bring about salvation, how can a sinner rest his faith on such insufficient grace? Now, as ever, by such a doctrine the fact that not all men are saved is explained by a difference in the divine will. And each attempt, even the most hidden, to explain the mystery in this manner renders the grace of God uncertain and destroys the foundation truth of the Christian confidence. The surest safeguard against all Calvinistic

ideas is firmly to adhere to the truth that there are not two conflicting wills in God concerning the salvation of men, but only one, and that this gracious will of God is sufficient to convert and save any sinner.

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### Synergism

The opposite way to explain the mystery is called Synergism. This expression is derived from a Greek word meaning co-operation, as if conversion were not entirely a work of the Holy Ghost but were brought about by the combined efforts of the Holy Spirit and the human will. This doctrine, as we have seen, stands condemned by all Bible texts which tell us that man by nature is spiritually blind and dead, that his will is even hostile toward God and cannot but resist Him until the Holy Ghost through the Gospel has kindled faith and a new spiritual life in his heart.

The author of synergism within the Lutheran Church was Melancthon. Although originally in perfect agreement with Luther, later on he tried to explain the mystery why e. g. David was accepted after his fall, while Saul was rejected, why Peter was again converted, while Judas who also repented of his sin was lost.

But he argued along a different line from Calvin. Since the cause for the difference cannot possibly lie in a two-fold will of God, he said, it must necessarily lie in a different conduct of man over against the divine grace. Man can work together with God toward his conversion by not resisting the Holy Ghost. This is the source of synergism in the Lutheran Church. (For particulars see "Conc. Cyclopedia," pg. 741f.)

Synergism in its coarsest form simply denies the truth that man by nature is dead in sins, unable to do anything spiritually good. According to this doctrine man by nature still possesses enough spiritual power to meet the Holy Ghost half-way when He is operating through the Word on his heart. If a man makes use of this power and ceases resisting the Holy Ghost, he is converted, if he continues resisting, he is not converted. Thus the Holy Ghost and man must co-operate if a conversion is to be effected.

This form of synergism which so shamelessly contradicts plain Scripture statements was soon disposed of in the Lutheran Church. But here, as ever, the error soon assumed more refined forms, and clad in a new garb, tried to gain admission. Thus J. Laternann, professor at Koenigsberg, thought he could re-



move the difficulty. He admitted that man by nature is spiritually blind, dead, and an enemy of God, that he cannot but resist the Holy Ghost if He approaches his heart. But as soon as the Holy Ghost, through the Gospel, begins His work, He operates on the will of man in such a way that new spiritual powers are imparted to him; and with these new spiritual powers, hence not with his natural strength, but by virtue of the divine grace, man can either decide for faith and conversion or remain in his natural state. Thus conversion or non-conversion—according to Latermann—depends on what use man makes of these new spiritual powers communicated to him by the Holy Ghost.

This sounds quite reasonable. But if you take a second look at the words you will see that there is a glaring contradiction in this train of thoughts; for as soon as there are new spiritual powers in the heart of man, he is no longer spiritually dead, but spiritually alive, hence converted, since conversion is an awakening from spiritual death. Thus, according to Latermann's doctrine, man is first converted by the Holy Ghost, and this converted man has the liberty to decide for or against conversion. Hence this form of synergism, too, was rejected, as unscriptural in the Lutheran Church.

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### **The Controversy in the American Lutheran Church**

When, about the year 1880, the controversy on predestination broke out between Missouri and Ohio, naturally, the doctrine of conversion was at once involved. Here, as in other controversies, an earlier and a later period is plainly to be observed. The utterances on the side of Iowa and Ohio in the former period were distinctly synergistic as to form and substance, while in the later years the tendency evidently prevailed to eliminate all synergistic elements, but at the same time firmly to adhere to the fundamental ideas of the first period. How far this can be consistently carried out will be seen later.

Since nowadays almost nobody in these Synods clings to the old expressions it will not be necessary to dwell at any length on statements of that period; a few quotations may suffice to substantiate the charge made above.

Prof. Gottfr. Fritschel in the article published in Brobst's "Monatshefte" in 1872, while condemning all coarse synergism, defends the more refined form of this error, as it was taught by Latermann.

He says, "That God wants to save the ones as well as the others, that He earnestly endeavors to take away the resistance from the ones as well as from the others, but that by some His gracious purpose is frustrated because they stubbornly and wilfully resist the grace offered to them, whereas in the others God's work is accomplished because they do not wilfully resist but let God's work be done on themselves." ("Monatshefte," 1872, pg. 99.) Nobody will deny that it is synergism to say, "God's work is accomplished **because they do not wilfully resist, but let God's work be done on themselves.**"

But even the word "synergism" was occasionally used in those days. The author of that article quotes approvingly the words of Philippi: "As therefore a certain synergism of man in using the means of grace even before the beginning of the inner activity of the divine grace is not to be excluded, so a synergism of the human will with the divine grace takes place not only after the conversion is completed but also during the act of conversion, but, of course, not a synergism of the naturally free will, but only a synergism of the will liberated through the grace" (l. c. pg. 91). This is exactly the synergism taught by Latermann who held that the will of man can co-operate with the Holy Spirit, not by natural powers but by powers communicated to him by the Holy Ghost. Again we must say: If the will of a man is liberated by the grace, that man is no longer spiritually dead but converted.

In the same synergistic manner the difference was explained in the Ohio Lutheran Kirchenzeitung, May 15, 1885, 76. "After God has done all that is necessary for the conversion and salvation of all men. . . . it depends to a great extent, yea, we may boldly say, everything depends on the conduct of man over against this grace of God and the means of grace: Whether he lets the grace operate on himself which he can do by the strength inherent in him, or whether in spite of it he wilfully thrust it away." (Quoted by Bente: "Was steht der Vereinigung der Lutherischen Synoden Amerikas im Wege?" pg. 69.)

The synergism contained in a great many of these older statements was so evident that in the course of time some of these expressions were either modified or dropped entirely. It seems to be an altogether new conception of the whole matter found in newer utterances of Ohio as well as Iowa. What most of all bewilders a person unaccustomed to their new mode of expression is the fact that they now ascribe the whole conversion from beginning to end, and in every respect, wholly and solely to the grace of God, who without any co-operation on the side of man performs the work of conversion, man doing nothing

but resisting the divine grace. And still they insist that this is essentially the same doctrine they have always confessed.

That the difference between the earlier and the later way to present their tenets actually lies more in the expressions than in their ideas will become apparent by a comparison of both.

Now, as ever, two different kinds of resistance are taught by them, the natural and the wilful resistance. The natural resistance, they say, is found in all men by nature, as soon as the grace of God approaches them, but sooner or later this natural resistance is overcome by the Holy Ghost, it never definitely prevents conversion.

But from this they distinguish another kind of resistance. Quite unnecessarily many people go beyond their natural wickedness and offer a resistance to the Holy Spirit which He is unable to overcome. This they call the wilful resistance.

Now when a person hears the Gospel all depends on whether only the natural resistance is found in him, or the wilful resistance also. In the first case he is converted without any synergism, any co-operation on his side; he only **resists** the work of the Holy Ghost (natural resistance), and this kind of resistance is overcome in his conversion.

But if he goes beyond his natural wickedness, resisting wilfully, then his conversion for the time being is frustrated. The Holy Ghost may try again, and perhaps often, but each time all depends on whether only the natural resistance or the wilful resistance also is found in him.

Thus on the one hand the conversion is entirely a work of the divine grace to which man offers nothing but opposition, and on the other hand everything after all depends on the conduct of man over against the divine grace. The **kind of resistance** he offers decides the matter.

This is exactly the old doctrine of Ohio and Iowa in a new garb. It is the old doctrine since, according to this conception, the final decision, either way, lies in the hand of man. If he stays within the limits of his natural depravity he is converted, because the grace of God is prepared to overcome that obstacle; if he, unnecessarily, goes beyond it, proceeding to a different kind of resistance to which his natural depravity does not urge him, the Holy Ghost cannot convert him.

The new distinguishing features are the following: The greatest difficulty in the old way of teaching always was to explain the abstaining from wilful resistance of those who are converted. This could never be explained without synergism! Because they still believed that man by nature is inclined to resist

wilfully, and this inclination must be overcome in some way. The new way gets rid of that difficulty by declaring that the wilful resistance is a wickedness which goes beyond the natural depravity of man, that the origin of this wickedness **cannot** and its absence **need** not be explained, because nothing in man urges him to such a conduct. For this reason the expression "abstaining from wilful resistance" (Unterlassen des mutwilligen Widerstrebens) may be entirely dropped and even rejected, in fact, **it is now rejected by them.**

Since only the natural resistance is overcome in conversion this result may be ascribed, and is ascribed, to the Holy Ghost alone without any co-operation of man. Herewith another difficulty is avoided, for where there is no co-operation on the part of man, but only opposition, there the reproach of synergism is removed.

Of course, there remains a difficulty in so far as it cannot be explained why some people go beyond their natural depravity to an unnatural wickedness. But this question is different from the former; they call it the psychological mystery, i. e., a mystery which concerns the inner life of man. On God's part they see nothing mysterious. He simply acts according to what kind of resistance He finds in man.

The following quotations from articles written by Dr. Lenski in the Ohio "Lutherische Kirchenzeitung" set forth the later conception. Regarding the difference between the natural and the wilful resistance he says: "There is a resistance which for all that **does not tear away from the Spirit and Word of God.** There, through Word and Spirit, the work goes on, there finally, perhaps very soon, a conversion is accomplished. This is usually called the natural resistance. But in many people, in a manner inexplicable to us, after Spirit and Word have laid hold on them (Nachdem Wort und Geist sie anpacken) such a resistance arises which utterly thrusts away Spirit and Word. There all further operation of the grace ceases. When such resistance is offered the Holy Ghost is unable to effect a conversion, the way is blocked to Him. This is usually called the wilful resistance." (Nov., 1923, pg. 690.)

The difference between the old and the new mode of presenting the doctrine finds expression in the following words: "In the old controversy some had the idea as though man were able to abstain from resistance by 'powers communicated to Him by the grace of God.' As if before his conversion God gave him powers by which he could drop his resistance, leaving it for man to decide whether he would use these powers or not. This whole conception is to be rejected here, and rightly so. There are no

such powers of grace given to the unconverted man which this man could either use or leave unused. Before his conversion no one operates with powers of grace. He who operates, from Whom all efficiency proceeds, is God alone with His Spirit and His grace in the means of grace." (1. c. Oct. 20, 1923, pg. 659.)

The expression "abstaining from wilful resistance" which in former years played such an important part is therefore discarded entirely: "What we dislike in this antithesis is the old expression of abstaining from wilful resistance which should altogether disappear in the doctrine of conversion. Why warm it up again? Where God's gracious powers do their work according to His will there man is converted—that is all there is to it. To speak or to think as if man in that case had abstained from wilful resistance is inaccurate (schief) and therefore misleading! When possibilities do not become realities this is by no means an abstaining." (1. c. Oct. 20, pg. 660.)

Prof. J. Becker, in his theses on "The Natural and the Wilful Resistance," presenting the Iowa and the Ohio position, says: "This natural resistance which in different men asserts itself (sich auswirkt) sometimes in one direction, sometimes more in another, before the conversion rules unhindered and unbroken (593, 20-24) but is found also after conversion in the children of God as the warring or lusting of the flesh against the Spirit. (Gal. 5, 7; Rom. 7, 23; 608, 84.)

"The Holy Ghost alone can break and overcome this resistance and He does it through the preaching and hearing of His Word," etc.

Mark that according to this conception **only the natural resistance** is overcome by the Holy Ghost, but of the wilful resistance the theses say:

"Wilful resistance is that conduct of sinful man whereby the work of the Holy Spirit operating through the means of grace is rendered impossible, or the work begun by the Holy Spirit is hindered so that it cannot be brought to a blessed end. It may take place before, in, and after conversion, it involves a direct conscious decision against God and is the deepest and last cause of the perdition of man. (Matt. 23, 27; Jo. 3, 18; 5, 40; 16, 9; Matt. 23, 3. 5. 6; 21, 35. 38. 39. F. C. 602, 57. 58. 712, 39-42.)"

Does this mean to say that the natural resistance is **not yet a direct, conscious decision against God?**

In his treatise "Die Lehre von der Bekehrung nach D. Hoeneckes Dogmatik," Dr. Geo. Fritschel writes pg. 45ff:

"1. The wilful resistance differs from the natural resistance not only gradually, but specifically. 2. The natural resistance

is merely a different expression for the original depravity in its manifestation. 3. The natural resistance is found in man before, in, and after conversion. 4. The natural resistance hinders conversion and puts many obstacles in its way, but it does not prevent conversion. 5. The natural resistance is rather overcome by grace, and the old man is subdued, yet it remains until death as a constant danger for man. . . . . 13. The effect of the wilful resistance is that the work of grace is not only hindered, but that it must cease entirely if the self-hardening becomes permanent. 15. This does not mean that in every case, with an act of wilful resistance, conversion is rendered impossible for all times; for the saving grace may start afresh and may a second or a tenth time accomplish what before was impossible. 17. The question about the origin of wilful resistance, as the question about the origin of sin itself, leads us into the depths of personal inner life, (in die Tiefe des persönlichen Seelenlebens), unknown to us, and we stand here before a psychological mystery which therefore we do not try to solve."

Prof. Becker, in his theses, says: "This question can be answered as little as the question why Adam sinned." Just as if from the will of natural man that is hostile toward God anything else but such a conduct could be expected. "There is nothing more natural," as Dr. Mezger once aptly put it, "than the wilful resistance."

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### The New Doctrine Examined

If we glance at the matter only superficially we might be tempted to think that this new definition of natural and wilful resistance, if not altogether satisfactory, might be tolerated as a comparatively harmless attempt to solve the difficulty. Is not here the whole conversion ascribed to the grace of God alone? And if no real synergism, no co-operation of man in his conversion is involved any longer, as was formerly the case, why can we not let this notion pass as a fancy that may be somewhat strange, but after all inoffensive?

First, we must not underrate the fact that this distinction, in the form in which it is taught nowadays, (one kind of resistance, unavoidable, **which the Holy Ghost always overcomes**, and another kind, entirely unnecessary, which He is **unable to overcome**), is nowhere taught in Scripture, it is human fiction pure and simple, just as purgatory is a human invention without any backing of Scripture whatever. This distinction was devised for the purpose of evading the difficulty which for our reason

lies in the Scriptural doctrine of conversion, and to solve a mystery which God has hid from us. It is an entirely new idea, unknown to the rest of the Christian Church, a strange doctrine, peculiar to the Synods of Ohio and Iowa exclusively.

And how pernicious is this idea! It undermines the very foundation of Christian doctrine. According to this conception of the natural depravity of man, a sinner by nature is not yet so bad that he would prevent his conversion if the Holy Ghost approaches him with the Word of God. Of course, he resists the grace, but he does not go so far as to frustrate the gracious purpose of God. To do this a special wickedness is required which goes beyond the natural depravity, and the origin of which is clouded in mystery. This means nothing less than tampering with the Scriptural doctrine of original sin and the natural depravity of man—a leaning toward the Roman Catholic shallowness in this respect.

Our Lutheran Confessions say in the Formula of Concord: "Secondly, God's Word testifies that the intellect, heart, and will of the natural unregenerated man in divine things are not only turned entirely away from God, but also turned and perverted **against** God to **every evil**; also that he is not only weak, incapable, unfit, and dead to good, but also (is) so lamentably perverted, infected, and corrupted by original sin that he is entirely evil, perverse and hostile to God by his disposition and nature, and that he is **exceedingly strong, alive and active with respect to everything that is displeasing and contrary to God.**" (St. L. pg. 243.)

Does not the wilful resistance belong to those things which are displeasing and contrary to God?

But by denying the truth that the natural wickedness of man is sufficient to frustrate the work of grace and by inventing an additional malice which is not found in man by nature, other great harm is done.

Such doctrine cannot but strengthen the unconverted man in his security. For if he hears that a special wickedness must be added to the natural resistance in order to frustrate the work of the Holy Ghost, he is led to think that therefore he has nothing to fear; he certainly will not consider himself and his conduct worse than natural. But the **fact** is that **each and every act of resistance** to the divine grace is a dangerous thing; for the least resistance of man may frustrate his conversion and cause his eternal perdition, because God has His own hours of grace, and we can never tell when He may withdraw His hand. There are certainly no special efforts required in order to be

eternally lost. Let man just remain in his natural wickedness and he will definitely prevent his conversion and salvation.

On the other hand, by stating that the Holy Ghost can overcome only natural resistance, but not wilful resistance, a limit is arbitrarily set for divine grace, as if it were no longer a sufficient grace over against a certain conduct of man. But thereby a troubled conscience is robbed of all comfort and support; for a Christian, troubled by his sin, will always see wilful resistance in his conduct and fear that, accordingly, there is no sufficient grace for him.

Should we then, avoid this expression and never speak of wilful resistance? That certainly would be going too far. Scripture and our Confessions use this expression, and it is very often found in our publications, in sermons, commentaries, etc. What we object to is not the use of this expression, but the wrong distinction that is made as between two kinds of resistance, one which the Holy Spirit always overcomes, and one which He is unable to overcome; one kind which naturally results from original sin and another kind the origin of which is said to be a mystery.

The wilful resistance in reality is nothing else but that resistance which is found in all men by nature, the hatred against all things spiritual which springs up in the heart as soon as the Word of God approaches it. Matt. 23, 37: "Ye would not." John 3, 19: "Men loved darkness rather than light." This resistance is called "wilful" to indicate that it is not a lack of divine grace but man's own evil will that prompts him to prefer darkness and spiritual death to light and life, and that consequently his eternal perdition is entirely his own fault.

It is true that the word "wilful" is usually not employed in describing the conduct of those that are converted, but from this it does not follow that their resistance was of a different kind, but there is merely no occasion to use the word "wilful" in their case since they are not lost.

Only in passing it may be mentioned that an attempt was made lately to avoid the difficulty by not at all raising that question from which the whole controversy proceeded. The underlying idea is this: If we never compare those that are converted and saved with those that are lost, the difficulty does not at all appear. So let us present the doctrine of conversion without comparing the two sides.

To this there is one serious objection. Those who offer this solution nevertheless cling to the idea of a two-fold kind of resistance in man. They insist that the doctrine of conversion be presented in no other order but this: Without drawing the



attention to the fact that two kinds of resistance are distinguished it must be shown in the first place that all men are "by nature equally guilty," by which they mean that the "natural resistance" is the same in all men. This natural resistance is described as an aversion to God's Word and grace and even a rebellion against God. But it must be added that this kind of resistance and rebellion can be overcome and is overcome by the Holy Ghost.

After the conversion has been ascribed to the Holy Ghost Who without any co-operation of man has overcome the natural resistance, it must be shown that there is one kind of opposition, the wilful resistance of man which the Holy Ghost cannot overcome. But under no circumstances must the question be raised and answered: Whence the difference?

This does not sound bad; but "there is a nigger in the wood-pile." By distinguishing two kinds of resistance the ominous question **is actually answered**, whether it is raised or not. The difficulty is removed in an underhand way. It must be said, however, that this attempt to veil the issue was made within the Iowa Synod only, while with the Ohioans the tendency always has been to tell frankly and plainly what they mean.

But all objections that have been raised during the controversy by one side or the other, justly or unjustly, would be cut off, and the pure, Scriptural doctrine of conversion would once more stand out in its clearness, if we could come to an agreement on the following truths:

It is one and the same divine grace, equally earnest, efficacious, and sufficient for all men, by which some are converted and saved and which is frustrated by the others through persistent resistance. Yet this wilful resistance, preventing conversion, is not a new wickedness, to be distinguished from the natural resistance, but the very natural resistance continued to the end. The question why, in spite of the equally gracious will of God and the equally evil will in man, the result of the work of the Holy Spirit is unequal, since some are converted and saved, while others are not, remains unsolved.

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## B

# ELECTION OR PREDESTINATION

### The Difficulties

What has been said in the previous chapter about conversion may help us better to understand the controversy on election; for here the same difficulties occur, only that predestination is an act of God which does not take place in this present time, but in eternity before time. In the doctrine of predestination God, as it were, grants us a glimpse into His eternal counsel of our salvation, but He shows us only so much of it as is good and salutary for us to know, while He withholds from us many things which we should like to know.

Now he who keeps strictly within the bounds of what is revealed to us, refraining from all speculating and searching after things which God has hidden from our knowledge, will meet no difficulties at all. To such a one the doctrine of election is a very simple and plain doctrine, easily understood, and full of comfort. In fact, this teaching which is generally considered a very difficult one is so simple that a child can understand it. But difficult it is to keep our thoughts within the limits drawn by Scripture. For this reason sometimes even experienced Christians find it not an easy task to grasp the various points of this doctrine. It is on account of these self-inflicted troubles that the doctrine of predestination must be classified with the "strong wine," and not with the "milk" of the Christian doctrine.

Every Lutheran knows from his Catechism the way of salvation. He knows that the Holy Ghost, through the Law, works the knowledge of sin and repentance, that through the Gospel He has called, enlightened, and converted us, creating faith in Christ in our hearts by which we have forgiveness of sins, strength for a new life and the certain hope of eternal life in heaven. This faith is also kept in our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the Word and the Sacrament until we have run the course and are permitted to enter into the joy of our Lord.

Add to this the simple truth that God accomplishes all this according to His eternal plan and purpose, so that the whole work of our salvation firmly rests upon this eternal, unchangeable decree of God, and you have, in a short outline, the whole doctrine of predestination.

So far there is no difficulty. On the contrary, it seems self-evident that God Who leads men to repentance and eternal salvation should have purposed and designed His work from

eternity, for Scripture says that "known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." (Acts. 15, 18.) Many things God carries out through the ministry of the holy angels, but not the work of our conversion and salvation, this He keeps in His own hands. It seems unthinkable that He should not have planned and arranged this great work in all its details.

Therefore no difficulties are encountered until we begin to think of those things which are **not yet revealed**, but hidden. There, for one thing, the old question returns: Why is it that God Who from eternity has loved all men and desires to save all, has predestinated only some and decided to lead them to eternal life, while this cannot be said of the rest? Whence the difference? This is the old difficulty which, as we have seen in the doctrine of conversion, must be solved neither by Calvinism, nor by Synergism, nor indirectly by weakening the doctrine of the total depravity of natural man. It can never be solved in this life.

But there are other questions that suggest themselves: Who are those whom God has predestinated from eternity? Do I belong to them, or not? God has neither revealed us the number nor given the names of the elect. And here is a point where a man is sure to go wrong as soon as he follows the course of his own thoughts.

This reasoning usually runs along one of two lines. Those that love sin and are carnal-minded will think: If it is true that God does all that is needed for salvation, that "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy," and that everything has been decided in eternity already, then I may do what I please, if I am elected I am safe, even if I now live in sins. And if I am not elected no efforts will do any good, I am bound to be lost in that case. So, then, the best thing I can do is to enjoy this life to my heart's desire.

On the other hand, people that are anxious about their soul's salvation are apt to think: All is well with those who are elected, they are on the safe side. But if I am in the number of those that are not elected I may do whatever I will, it is all in vain, I am doomed to perdition.

Especially if they compare themselves with other Christians, such people are always inclined to consider others as elect children of God, but themselves as reprobates, because they know their own shortcomings. Luther also had to experience such dark hours of spiritual trials and doubts concerning his election, especially in his younger years, and was almost driven to despair by them. But the distress and anguish of his soul led him only so much deeper into the Word of God. Without those doubts

and troubles Luther would never have become such a reliable guide, as in other doctrines, so especially in the one of predestination. It will, therefore, be worth our while, under a special heading, to give a short sketch of Luther's way of handling the doctrine of predestination, inserting a few expressions of Brenz and other Fathers who followed in the steps of Luther.

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### Luther's Advice and the Formula of Concord

Above all, Luther warns unexperienced Christians who cannot yet stand the "strong wine" to stay away from this doctrine and to keep to the "milk" of the divine Word, the plain and simple doctrines of redemption through the blood of Christ, repentance, forgiveness of sins, etc. But Christians whose spiritual life is ripened through crosses and tribulations, and those who have learned to silence all thoughts and objections of their proud reason, will derive great benefit and comfort from this doctrine, especially in the dark hours of trials and doubts regarding their final salvation.

Again, Luther reminds us that this doctrine must be handled in the proper manner in order to derive the full benefit of it. It is all wrong to start out with the question: Do I belong to the number of those that from eternity are predestinated to salvation? Since God has not revealed to us a register with the names of the elect it is in vain to approach the matter in this way, and he who tries to pry into God's counsel will never succeed, but will come to grief. "This is not the knack of it," says Luther. (Das ist nicht der Griff dazu.)

Instead of His giving us such information which sinful men would only misuse, God so arranged it that each child of God can find his election in Scripture, while those who are carnally minded and would misuse this doctrine can do nothing with this revelation of God, they will find no foothold whatever for their false security.

Luther here uses a parable. He compares a person trying to pry into the secrets of God's counsel to a man who wants to go into the upper story of a house, but who, instead of using the staircase, is foolish enough to climb the roof. Why, he will break his neck, Luther says. The proper way **is not to start above**, at the roof, **but below**, and then, step by step, ascend the stairway, until the upper story is reached.

By the same process a Christian, if only he starts below, and then, step by step, follows the order indicated in God's revela-

tion, will finally arrive above and find his election and final salvation firmly founded in the eternal decree of God.

The staircase, or ladder, by which we are to climb into heaven is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, as He is revealed to us in the Gospel. Therefore Luther emphasizes so often that predestination must be viewed **only in Christ, and according to the revealed Word.**

But what are **the steps** by which a Christian arrives at the certainty of his election? The first step is the love of God which moved Him from eternity to ordain His Son to be the Redeemer of sinful, fallen mankind, and to send Him at the appointed time into this world. Therefore, if you want to know whether God wants to save you, whether He really means your salvation, go to Bethlehem, to the stable, and the manger, and consider, what you are seeing there God has prepared for you from eternity, a Savior Who should redeem you from sin and death and bring you eternal life. This is the first step.

And now we ascend the second. What the Son of God has done and suffered for us here on earth, His whole redemption, God has put into the Gospel, into His Word and Sacrament. Through these means of grace He offers and distributes these gifts among men. "Come, for all things are now ready," this invitation is meant for **all**, no one is excluded. Thus there can be no doubt, it is meant for you also. Of course, he who despises God's Word and Sacrament does not go along with us, does not at all ascend this step. But we, who are using Word and Sacrament, proceed to the third step.

Here the question arises: Are not many lost although they use the means of grace? Is it not a fact that most men hear the Word of God in vain, because they do not accept it? There is no denying this fact. But the fault does not lie with God, as though He did not earnestly desire to convert and save all hearers. God wants His Word to be effective in all hearers. To this end He gives His Holy Spirit with the Word Who, working on the minds of all hearers, wants to convert them to faith in Christ. Therefore those that hear the Word and yet despise the Savior and His Gospel have indeed no part in God's grace, the election does not concern them at all. But those that through the Gospel have been converted to faith in Christ will now go on to the fourth step.

Through faith in Christ a believer has forgiveness of all his sins, Christ's righteousness is his, and in Christ God loves him as His child, and holds out to him a great and wonderful hope,

that after this life he shall have eternal life and happiness with God in heaven. All these gifts are to be had by faith in Christ only.

But "Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." Therefore, in the fifth place, God's order of salvation implies that those who believe walk in Christian love and all good works, thus leading a life in sanctification. A Christian not willing to do this would thereby lose his faith and the grace of God and drop out of the number of those that are on the way of life. But a true Christian "delights in the Law of God after the inward man."

And yet, how weak and defective is the sanctification of our lives! Must not this again shake our confidence and hope? But even this frailty God has taken into consideration. Because of the weakness of our flesh and the wickedness of the world and the devil He has given the most precious promises to His children, that He Himself will protect them against their enemies, and strengthen them with His divine power, so that no one can pluck them out of His hands (Jo. 10, 28). The very crosses and tribulations which God from eternity has carefully apportioned to each and every one of His children must help to keep them on the narrow way. This is the sixth step.

But how about the future? **Now** we are enjoying the grace of God, and are fighting the good fight of faith. But shall we **endure to the end**? The seventh step therefore, leads us entirely away from all self-confidence and has us depend on God's promises and faithfulness alone, even with respect to our enduring unto the end. He Who hath begun a good work in us will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ; but in no other way than through His Word. That is understood as a matter of course that Christians faithfully use the means of grace, pray diligently, and conduct themselves as good soldiers of Christ.

And, finally, whoever is found on this way has, in the eighth place, the assurance that, as God has performed the former,—the calling, conversion, sanctification, and preservation in faith,—so the last thing, the final salvation and glory in heaven, will assuredly follow.

For the meaning of all this is not that God only in general has prepared a way of salvation and now leaves it to man whether or not he wants to avail himself of that opportunity. No, everything, from beginning to end, is procured for each one of the elect in the eternal, unalterable decree of God; so that their final salvation is firmly established. God wants us to believe this. This firm assurance of our eternal election and final salvation which the Holy Ghost Himself, through the Word of God, creates

in our heart can never deceive a man. As he believeth, according to the will of God, so shall it be done unto him.

This is the way and these are the steps by which a Christian may come to the certainty of his election and salvation. The number of these steps, of course, is immaterial. By summarizing or specifying some of the items you may count fewer or more than eight.

Now here a number of quotations from Luther, Brenz and others, could be added to prove that this really is Luther's way of considering predestination. But instead of tiring the reader with lengthy quotations let us, for this time, take a short cut. From the writings of N. Selnecker, one of the authors of the Formula of Concord, we know that in drawing up the article of predestination the theologians who drafted this Confession were careful to follow the order indicated by Luther. Therefore, looking into our Confessional Books, you will find in the XI Article of the Formula of Concord the same train of thoughts, shortly comprehended in eight points, and more explicitly followed up in the following paragraphs. (St. Louis edition, pg. 288ff.) This circumstance enabled us to present Luther's doctrine of election and that of the Formula of Concord under one heading, for both are one and the same thing.

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### The Scriptural Proof

The main proof texts for the Lutheran doctrine of election are Eph. 1, 3-6; Rom. 8, 28-31; Matt. 22, 2-14.

In the first passage, Eph. 1, 3-6 all spiritual blessing which we receive from God, hence our whole state of grace, including everything which belongs to it, is traced back to our eternal predestination by grace alone before the foundation of the world.

The second passage, Rom. 8, 28-31 shows that those who were predestinated back in eternity are now called and converted through the Gospel, justified and finally glorified, so that, since God is for them, according to His eternal purpose, no one can prevail against them. The following verses contain the same trend of thought.

Matt. 22, 2-14 does not directly and specifically set forth the doctrine of predestination, still this passage is of great importance in this connection, because from it we see to what amount of trouble and expense, humanly speaking, God went in preparing redemption and salvation for fallen mankind; how much He is in earnest when He calls sinners by the Gospel, so much so that

His wrath burns like fire against all those who refuse His invitation. This proves that certainly no sinner is lost on account of a lack of grace on the part of God. The door is open to all, there is also plenty of room for all, and everyone is not only urgently invited but also heartily welcome. Nevertheless considering the great number of those called in vain, the fact remains that comparatively only few are chosen and, according to their eternal election, are converted and finally saved. These are the main points of this parable.

In addition to these passages there are many other texts of Scripture which set forth one or another point of this doctrine. These texts may be looked up in the XI Art. of the Formula of Concord. Those that are mentioned above may suffice to show that the way to handle the doctrine of predestination found in our Lutheran Confessions is strictly Scriptural.

He who reads the masterly exposition of this doctrine, as found in the Formula of Concord, and sees the points which the authors are careful to bring out, will thank God with all his heart for this bright light. The XI Art. of the Formula of Concord is undoubtedly the best and most perfect exposition of the doctrine of predestination that was ever written. Christians should read it again and again until every feature of it is quite familiar to them.

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### The Election "In View of Faith"

Unfortunately Luther's advice and the principles laid down in the XI Art. of the Formula of Concord were, more or less, ignored in the century following, and afterwards entirely forgotten. It seemed too complicated a process to comprehend all those truths which belong to a salutary use of this doctrine and to ascend step by step from the universal grace of God to the certainty of our personal election and final salvation.

The Lutheran theologians of the seventeenth century preferred a way that seemed simpler and more effective in their controversies with the Calvinists. They reduced the whole doctrine of predestination to the mere statement that God in eternity has elected to eternal life all those whom He saw would endure in their faith unto the end. This seems very simple, indeed, and to present the doctrine of election in this manner, accordingly, came more and more in vogue among the Lutheran theologians of the seventeenth and the following centuries.

This, however, is neither the doctrine of predestination as presented in Scripture, nor—what amounts to the same—that of



Luther and of our Confessions. And, if closely examined, how worthless is such a meaningless statement of an "election in view of faith," as it was called, compared with the doctrine of our Formula of Concord!

If a Christian is worried by doubts concerning his faithfulness to the end, he will find in this formula no foothold for his faith and no consolation whatever. If God has seen from eternity that he will remain faithful, then He has elected him, and he will be saved. That is all the information he will get. But that is just the question which troubles him, **will he remain faithful?**

While the authors of this expression strongly protested that faith was in no sense a **cause** of election, nevertheless the time came when this formula of an election in view of faith was used to explain why only a few are elected. It seems plausible that only a few are elected because only a few believe unto the end.

But it is easily seen that this explanation is unsatisfactory, because it does not explain anything. Is not faith, according to Scripture, a gift of God? What light, then, do we gain from the information that God has elected those in whom He knew He would create and preserve the saving faith? Only if faith were a product of our own efforts which God would take into consideration,—only in that case this formula would explain the difference. But those who know and sincerely believe that our conversion and our preservation in faith is entirely a work of divine grace should never for a moment be deceived by such a useless shift as the idea of an "election in view of faith." It was entirely their own fault when those theologians who used this formula had a hard stand against the Calvinists who were quick to see its weak points.

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### The Two Forms of Doctrine in the American Lutheran Church

Within the Missouri Synod a few writers in former times had used the second form of doctrine, "in view of faith." But very soon Dr. Walther perceived the shortcomings of this later mode of teaching. It would be going too far to bluntly condemn this form as false doctrine, for it is true that God knew from eternity which would believe to the end and which would not. And it is furthermore true that only those are elected who believe and are faithful unto death. But the doctrine of predestination is not expressed in these few words. The Synod of Missouri, therefore, decided no longer to use this second form in their midst, but only the mode of the Formula of Concord.

The Ohio Synod, on the other hand, not perceiving the marked difference between these two modes of doctrine, officially adopted the later form, "election in view of faith," as their own doctrine of predestination.

They tried to harmonize the doctrine of the Formula of Concord and that of the later dogmaticians by distinguishing between an election in the wider sense (election of **the means of salvation**) and election in the narrower sense (election of **persons**) Cf. Schuette, "Zeugnisse," pg. 13. There is, however, no place, neither in Scripture nor in the Confessions, where an election of means is mentioned. The object of election are always men, not things.

But although no direct false doctrine is expressed in the second, useless form, especially as long as the doctrines of original sin and of conversion are kept in their purity, still, by the slightest error in one of these doctrines the second mode of teaching immediately gains a new aspect. For if conversion or non-conversion depends on the kind of resistance which man offers, then election in view of faith means nothing else but this that God from eternity merely looked on the conduct of man, whether he would offer only natural resistance or wilful resistance also. In the one case He elected him, in the other He did not. Thus election or non-election would simply depend on the conduct of natural man which God foresaw from eternity.

The most comforting doctrine of the gracious election is thus turned into a mere legal action, and the sweetest Gospel into a new Law, the great commandment of which reads: "Thou shalt not resist wilfully."

The "Joint Synod Record" of 1920 (Wisconsin Distr. of Ohio Synod.) contains a paper on the doctrine of election in which the following short summary of the Ohio conception of this doctrine is given: "God has been merciful toward all men and will have all men to be saved. How does it come to an election? Through man, because the grace cannot perform its work in all men. The fact that, in spite of the equally earnest calling, some are not saved results from their wilful resistance. The natural resistance is found in all men, but God overcomes it. If, however, a man, besides this, resists also wilfully, stubbornly, obstinately, the grace of God cannot accomplish anything in him, for it does not force him." (Pg. 30.)

Here we see the mystery of election solved by the distinction of the natural and the wilful resistance. The election in view of faith is here reduced to an election in view of the conduct of natural man over against the grace of God, the deciding factor being the kind of resistance that is offered by man.

The leading thought of the older Iowa conception is practically the same. Only the wording is different. They used to say that predestination is nothing else but the universal grace of God, His gracious will toward all men, as far as it is realized. God will have all men to be saved by Christ. Now, as far as the unconverted are concerned, this will is not carried out, but frustrated. But in those that are converted and saved, it is fulfilled. In so far as the will of God is fulfilled and realized they call it predestination.

This also seems very plain and simple. This attempted explanation, however, labors under the sad mistake that what here is called predestination is something altogether different from what Scripture and our Confessions mean by this expression. It does away not only with the mystery of predestination, but also with the doctrine itself, leaving nothing of it but the mere name.

Thus Dr. S. Fritschel explained the doctrine of election. He writes: "The Iowa Synod also teaches the particularism of predestination, but maintains with the Confessions that it nevertheless is the same gracious will as the universal. According to the latter, God will have all men to be saved, yet not unconditionally, but in the order of faith. Now, since He knows from eternity how many there are that, within this order, let themselves be saved, the universal will to save all believers becomes the will to save just this certain number. The universal will thus becomes particular without suffering any alteration, but simply by **passing under the aspect of the divine foreknowledge.**" ("Unterscheidungslehren," pg. 64.)

Add to this the distinction of the two different kinds of resistance, and the Iowa conception of predestination is nothing else but the universal will of God to save all those who do not resist wilfully. Whether this will of God is realized or not depends entirely on the conduct of natural man.

Read the XI Article of the Formula of Concord carefully and you will see at once that the above conception is not the Lutheran doctrine of predestination. Never would this universal will of God have caused those dark hours of doubts and trials to our Luther. In fact, the doctrine of the universal grace of God does not belong to the strong wine at all, but to the milk of Christian doctrine. How can the realization of this universal grace be identical with predestination!

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### A Third Form

The Ohio Synod up to the recent time has taught an election "in view of faith," trying hard to harmonize this form with the XI Article of the Formula of Concord. Within the Iowa Synod, however, some began to notice that this expression (in view of faith) does not at all fit into the manner in which the Confession presents this doctrine. In the XI Article of the Formula of Concord predestination, throughout, is a **cause of faith**. How, then, can it depend on faith?

But also in another respect the older Iowa definition labored under a slight inconsistency. It did not escape Dr. Geo. Fritschel that, if predestination is nothing else but the universal grace of God in its realization, then there is no reason in the world why those people who believe for a time only, and afterwards fall away, should not be considered as predestinated for the time they believe. For as long as they do this the gracious will of God **is realized in them**. This conclusion is correct.

But why stop at this point? The redemption of the whole human race through Christ already is a realization of the universal grace of God. So, why not be consistent and stretch predestination so that it refers to all redeemed sinners? This is what the Lutheran professor, Sam. Huber, did whose error was rejected by the Lutheran Church, while Huber himself, on account of his false doctrine, in 1594, was dismissed from his professorship. Dr. Fritschel does not go as far as Huber did. But he escapes his error only by a kind of fortunate inconsistency.

This wrong opinion, as though predestination were nothing but the gracious will of God toward all men, in so far as it is realized, led Dr. Fritschel to a strange misconception of Luther's doctrine of predestination. Had he, without any prejudice, accepted Luther's advice, this could not have failed to lead to a better understanding. But, presuming that Luther's conception of predestination was the same as that of Iowa, he instinctively foisted his own thoughts on Luther, making him say things which Luther never dreamt of.

The words "below" and "above" which Luther uses to illustrate the way in which a Christian should ascend by steps to the certainty of his election suggested the idea to Dr. Fritschel that predestination may be looked at from two different points of view, that of God (from above), and that of man (from below).

He says: "A. If you are thinking 'from above' you are placing yourself with your thoughts in the time before the creation of the world and are reflecting on what God would do in the future, whereby it easily comes to what the Formula of Concord explains sec. 9-11.

"B. If you are thinking 'from below,' you are, from the viewpoint of a pious and believing child of God, considering whence the present and future salvation, according to the Word of God, is come upon you, resp. will come (i. e., as a realization of an eternal counsel of grace) and all features given in sec. 12 are found so that this is a most comforting doctrine." ("Quellen und Dokumente," pg. 355.)

That this mode of presenting the doctrine of predestination cannot possibly be that of Luther also appears from the fact that according to Dr. Fritschel both methods are admissible, although the second method is said to be preferable. Luther, on the other hand, admits only one method, starting below, and in the strongest terms condemns the other as utterly wrong and misleading.

Setting forth the difference between the universal grace of God and predestination Dr. Fritschel says: "In predestination the will of God is viewed 'from below,' in the universal gracious will (im allgemeinen Heilswillen) 'from above.'" By "starting above" Luther means to speculate, without the Word of God, on His secret counsel. Does Dr. Fritschel mean to say that this is done in viewing the universal grace of God?

It is seen from these quotations that Dr. Fritschel cannot even use Luther's expressions unchanged but has to alter them to make them fit into his own system. Luther's "starting below" (unten anheben) is changed in "viewing from below" (von unten aus betrachten) and his "starting above" (oben anheben) in "viewing from above" (von oben aus betrachten). This shows what a hopeless task it is trying to harmonize the new Iowa doctrine of predestination and Luther's method.

It is quite true that a Christian may, from a certain standpoint, view the realization of God's gracious will in himself. And if he, in his thinking, keeps within the limits of the truths revealed in Scripture, there is absolutely no objection to such meditations, no matter what standpoint he takes.

If at the same time, however, either openly or secretly, it is held that the realization of God's gracious will depends on the kind of resistance man offers, then this method of presenting predestination conceals a dangerous trap. In that case it becomes possible to misapply all the good old Lutheran terms. E. g., predestination may be called God's eternal counsel and decree of our salvation, it may be admitted that nothing in us moves God to this decree, etc., etc., and yet two entirely different conceptions of predestination may be found in these words, the old Lutheran and the newest Iowa conception.

Such ambiguity is avoided by presenting the doctrine of election, not as viewed from a certain position or standpoint, but,

according to Luther, as comprehending the whole counsel of God concerning our salvation. This method, proceeding, by steps, from the universal grace of God to the certainty of our personal election and final salvation, safeguards the pure doctrine of election, provided, of course, the idea of a two-fold kind of resistance is rejected.

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### Contradictory Wills in God

There is yet one stumbling-block to be removed which, at the time of the Formula of Concord, and also during the present controversy, has caused much needless trouble. It is a fact that, time and again, synergists of the seventeenth century and such modern theologians as openly espouse the cause of synergism have found fault with the XI Article of the Formula of Concord, asserting that this presentation of the doctrine of election labored under a glaring inconsistency, teaching two contradictory wills in God; one according to which He wants all men to be saved, and another according to which He wants only some to be saved, the elect.

It is hard to comprehend how such a baseless criticism could ever be raised, since the Formula of Concord knows only the one gracious will of God toward all men.

Now this same objection is raised against the doctrine of the Missouri Synod, as though we taught on the one hand that God wants to save all men, and on the other hand, that He wants to save only some, the elect. Although this latter statement at all times has been rejected by us **as false Calvinistic doctrine**, and although the spokesmen in our publications repeatedly protested that we do not teach two wills in God, but only one, thus disposing of the imputation,—still the objection was upheld and is threatened to be upheld unless we submit to the conception of predestination as being nothing but the universal gracious will of God as far as this will is realized.

Whence this objection? First it is to be admitted that in the very beginning of the controversy, about fifty years ago, a few expressions were used on our side which could easily be misunderstood in a Calvinistic sense. This often is the case in doctrinal controversies, before the matter is discussed from every angle, even those who defend the truth occasionally make a slip, using expressions which are open to objection and which, in the course of the controversy, are eliminated.

Thus, in this case, a number of expressions which were precarious have been withdrawn long ago. Dr. Walther was the

only theologian who, in this controversy, was courageous and conscientious enough voluntarily to publish a number of expressions which he himself withdrew, and which, since that time, have never been used in our publications. ("Lehre und Wehre," XXVII, pg. 43-54.) Nevertheless these very expressions which were retracted almost fifty years ago, have been unceasingly used to make it appear as though the doctrine of the Missouri Synod were Calvinistic.

But even though we set aside those old expressions, Ohioans and Iowans cannot rid themselves of the thought that our doctrine, **as it really is**, contains a contradiction, ascribing two contradictory wills to God. There is a special cause for this misunderstanding which, however, may be removed by making the proper distinction between the mere **will** and the eternal **decree** of God, which is usually ignored by them.

But **there is a difference** between a mere will and a firm decision or decree. There are many things which God wills, and wills earnestly, but they are never done, or done merely in part. Thus e. g. God wills that all men should keep His commandments, that all should hear and accept His Word, but they do not do it, at least not all of them. But when God decides and firmly decrees to do a certain thing He unfailingly carries it out, without any exception. (Is. 14, 27; Luke 22, 22; Acts 17, 31.)

It would, therefore, be utterly wrong to speak of an eternal purpose or decree of God that all men shall be converted and come to eternal life. Never does Scripture mention such a decree. But it would be equally wrong to say, God wills that only the elect shall be saved. No, God wills that **all men** be saved.

Keeping in mind this old and perfectly Scriptural distinction there will be no difficulty. It is true, if predestination were merely a will of God that a certain number of men be saved, and nothing more, then this will of God would be in conflict with His will that all men be saved. That would, indeed, be teaching two contradictory wills in God. But now predestination is **not merely a divine will** the realization of which may be frustrated by men, but it is **an eternal purpose, and decree of God** which comprises the whole counsel of our salvation, and "which cannot fail nor be overthrown." (F. C. St. L. pg. 290.)

Hence no contradictory wills in God are taught when we say that we know only one gracious will of God which is revealed to us in the Gospel, and which pertains to all men without distinction, **but** that we distinguish from this universal will of God the eternal purpose and decree of election which does not pertain to all men but only to those that are finally saved. True, we do

not know the reason why this decree of predestination extends over a certain number only, although the mercy of God in Christ which is the cause of this decree is universal. From Scripture this only is certain: that the cause of predestination and eternal salvation is to be found in God and His grace only, while the cause of eternal perdition is to be found in man's evil will only. Everything beyond these two truths belongs to the secrets into which we should not even wish to pry.

Having thus returned to the starting point of this chapter, we may now recapitulate giving the result of our treatise on this doctrine in the following summary:

**Election or predestination is not a mere will of God that certain men be saved, but an eternal unchangeable purpose or decree of God which in all its parts from beginning to end is unfailingly carried out in all elect.**

Since the eternal decree of God is not revealed to us in its totality, but in part only, the proper way to regard predestination is to view it in Christ only or according to the revealed Word of God, beginning with the mercy of God which in Christ has appeared to all men, and then, step by step, considering how God by way of the Gospel call, conversion, justification, sanctification and preservation, safely and infallibly leads His children to eternal life in heaven.

While the gracious will of God which is realized in the elect and is the cause of their predestination is no other than the same gracious will which extends likewise over all men, still the reason why,—in spite of the same wickedness of all men and the same eternal mercy of God toward all,—already in eternity, only a certain number of men are predestinated is a mystery which is not revealed to us in Scripture, and which, therefore, we should not try to solve.

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VI

INERRANCY OF THE SCRIPTURES

### The Latest Difference

To the doctrinal differences which for many years have separated the above-mentioned Synods recently a new one was added which, however, has not yet been thoroughly discussed and to which therefore, only brief reference will be made.

At the negotiations which were carried on among the synods of Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo to merge these three synods into one body, the Joint Merger Commission had agreed upon the following paragraph to be embodied in the new constitution.

"The Synod accepts all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as **the inspired and inerrant Word of God**, and the **only source**, norm, and guide of faith and life."

But when during the summer of 1926 the Iowa Synod at its convention was deliberating on this matter, besides other changes of minor importance, it was decided to consent to the proposed merger only on condition that this paragraph be changed to read thus:

"The Synod accepts all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as **the inspired Word of God and the inerrant and only source**, norm, and guide of faith and life." (The "Pastor's Monthly" Vol. IV, pg. 587f.)

It is not to be wondered at that the Ohio Synod which held its convention a week later was surprised at this condition and asked, why this change?

A comparison of the two texts shows that in the first the Bible in all its parts is confessed to be the true and inerrant Word of God, while the second only states that the Bible is inerrant **as the source, norm, and guide of Christian faith and life**; but nothing is said about the inerrancy of the Bible in other things.

Since before this there had not been the slightest suspicion of the Iowa Synod's being touched by modernism, as far as the doctrine of inspiration is concerned, it was but natural that the proposed change aroused attention in other Synods also which were not directly involved. The first effect of this attitude of Iowa was that the Ohio Synod which otherwise would have been ready for the merger, for the time being, left the matter in suspense awaiting further developments.

An explanation is found in an article of Dr. Reu in the "Kirchliche Zeitschrift," August, 1926, on the Peculiarity of the American Lutheran Church and Theology. The author thinks that in the American Lutheran Church three tendencies (Richtungen) are to be distinguished. He sees in the first place such as seem to refer the inerrancy of Scripture only to those things

which have a bearing on the saving truth; in minor things, however, admit the possibility of error. Secondly, there are such as confess the inerrancy of the Bible in all things and deny Church-fellowship to those of the first class. Thirdly, there are such as would not deny Church-fellowship to those that admit the possibility of error.

In the light of this declaration of Dr. Reu, it seems there is a faction within the Iowa Synod which would not be bound by a paragraph confessing the Scripture to be the Word of God inerrant in every respect.

On the other hand, Dr. G. Fritschel gives us the assurance that the new form has no other purpose than to avoid a material alteration of the unchangeable paragraphs of the Iowa constitution. (Wisconsin "Quartalschrift," January, 1927, pg. 91.) But the form adopted by the Joint Merger Commission involves a material change of the Iowa constitution only if this document does not yet contain a confession of the inerrancy of Scripture, or if such confession is meant in the modern sense only.

Be this as it may, the "Lutheran Witness" (February 7, 1928) evidently is right in presuming that "the situation in the Iowa Synod is somewhat mixed." The fact remains that while in the form adopted by the Joint Merger Commission the inerrancy of the whole Bible is expressly confessed, this point is deliberately left open in the new form demanded by Iowa.

If a controversy should arise on the subject broached by Dr. Reu, the Iowans, in order to keep peace within their own household, might find themselves tempted to acknowledge a new "open question" which the Fathers of their Synod would have repudiated.

May God give them strength to overcome this touch of modernism in their midst.\*

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### Conclusion

Looking over the list of differences discussed in the preceding chapters it might seem as though one important point were forgotten. There is one question on which Missouri and Iowa have never really agreed, the question concerning the binding force of the Confessions of our Church.

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\* As this goes to the press the welcome news reaches us that the Iowa Synod, at its general convention, adopted a resolution confessing the inspiration and inerrancy of the whole Bible, no longer insisting on the form adopted in 1926.

In whatever way the matter was expressed, whether it was said that all articles of faith or all doctrinal matter contained in the Confessions is binding, Iowa would always accept such correct statement, but with the reservation that the differences still existing **do not belong to the sphere of doctrines, articles of faith**, etc. No matter, therefore, what form is chosen, the question will never be settled as long as any differences remain.

If, however, the doctrinal differences could be settled and a real agreement be brought about in all the contested doctrines, then the controversy about the binding force of the Confessions would automatically cease because, in that case, nothing would be left to be excepted from the terms "doctrines, articles of faith," etc. This difference, then, was not forgotten, but it would adjust itself with the removal of the doctrinal differences.

But will it ever be possible to reach the much desired harmony in faith and doctrine? The unity of the Church is easily disturbed and a separation is quickly accomplished, but it is very difficult, and often impossible, to heal the breach later on. Here no human skill and wisdom will suffice unless God leads the hearts to true unity.

It is true that the present time, in some respects, is more favorable for a settlement than any time before. The heat of the controversy is passed, the minds of the combatants have calmed down, there is more common ground than ever because the contending parties have come nearer to each other, and it is now possible to overlook the whole territory.

But at the same time there is one grave danger threatening us. Because a great many are tired of doctrinal controversies, and the differences do no longer seem so important, we are apt to content ourselves with the common ground on which we stand overlooking the differences that are still left.

Such a union without true unity in faith and doctrine, however, would be a calamity for the Lutheran Church, the testimony and the sufferings of our Fathers would then have been in vain.

Let all who love our American Lutheran Zion, by their prayers and their faithful adherence to the truth help to further true unity and prevent a false union.

Lord Jesus Christ with us abide,  
For round us falls the eventide,  
Nor let Thy Word, the heavenly light,  
For us be ever veiled in night.